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VELVET GLOVE

HENRY SETON MERRIMAN

KD 16443

"'ARE YOU SURE YOU HAVE NOT HEARD FROM PAPA?'"

The
VELVET GLOVE

By

Henry Seton Merriman

Author of
"The Sowers," "In Kedar's Tents,"
"The Isle of Unrest," etc., etc.

New York
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The Velvet Glove

CHAPTER I

IN THE CITY OF THE WINDS

THE Ebro, as all the world knows—or will pretend to know, being an ignorant and vain world—runs through the city of Saragossa. It is a river, moreover, which should be accorded the sympathy of this generation, for it is at once rapid and shallow.

On one side it is bordered by the wall of the city. The left bank is low and sandy, liable to flood; a haunt of lizards in the summer, of frogs in winter-time. The lower bank is bordered by poplar trees, and here and there plots of land have been recovered from the river-bed for tillage and the growth of that harsh red wine which seems to harden and thicken the men of Aragon.

One night, when a half moon hung over the domes of the Cathedral of the Pillar, a man made his way through the undergrowth by the riverside and stumbled across the shingle towards the open shed which marks the landing-place of the only ferry across the Ebro that Saragossa possesses. The ferry-boat was moored to the landing-

stage. It is a high-prowed, high-sterned vessel, built on Viking lines, from a picture the observant must conclude, by a landsman carpenter. It swings across the river on a wire rope, with a running tackle, by the force of the stream and the aid of a large rudder.

The man looked cautiously into the vine-clad shed. It was empty. He crept towards the boat and found no one there. Then he examined the chain that moored it. There was no padlock. In Spain to this day they bar the window heavily and leave the door open. To the cunning mind is given in this custom the whole history of a great nation.

He stood upright and looked across the river. He was a tall man with a clean cut face and a hard mouth. He gave a sharp sigh as he looked at Saragossa outlined against the sky. His attitude and his sigh seemed to denote a long journey accomplished at last, an object attained perhaps or within reach, which is almost the same thing, but not quite. For most men are happier in striving than in possession. And no one has yet decided whether it is better to be among the lean or the fat.

Don Francisco de Mogente sat down on the bench provided for those that await the ferry, and, tilting back his hat, looked up at the sky. The northwest wind was blowing—the Solano—as it only blows in Aragon. The bridge below the ferry has, by the way, a high wall on the upper side of it to break this wind, without which no cart could cross the river at certain times of the year. It came roaring down the Ebro, bending the tall poplars on the lower bank, driving before it a cloud of dust on the Saragossa side. It lashed the waters of the river to

a gleaming white beneath the moon. And all the while the clouds stood hard and sharp of outline in the sky. They hardly seemed to move towards the moon. They scarcely changed their shape from hour to hour. This was not a wind of heaven, but a current rushing down from the Pyrenees to replace the hot air rising from the plains of Aragon.

Nevertheless, the clouds were moving towards the moon, and must soon hide it. Don Francisco de Mogente observed this, and sat patiently beneath the trailing vines, noting their slow approach. He was a white-haired man, and his face was burnt a deep brown. It was an odd face, and the expression of the eyes was not the usual expression of an old man's eyes. They had the agricultural calm, which is rarely seen in drawing-rooms. For those who deal with nature rarely feel calm in a drawing-room. They want to get out of it, and their eyes assume a hunted look. This seemed to be a man who had known both drawing-room and nature; who must have turned quietly and deliberately to nature as the better part. The wrinkles on his face were not those of the social smile, which so disfigure the faces of women when the smile is no longer wanted. They were the wrinkles of sunshine.

"I will wait," he said placidly to himself in English, with, however, a strong American accent. "I have waited fifteen years—and she doesn't know I am coming."

He sat looking across the river with quiet eyes. The city lay before him, with the spire of its unmatched cathedral, the domes of its second cathedral, and its many towers outlined against the sky just as he had seen them

fifteen years before—just as others had seen them a hundred years earlier.

The great rounded cloud was nearer to the moon now. Now it touched it. And quite suddenly the domes disappeared. Don Francisco de Mogente rose and went towards the boat. He did not trouble to walk gently or to loosen the chains noiselessly. The wind was roaring so loudly that a listener twenty yards away could have heard nothing. He cast off and then hastened to the stern of the boat. The way in which he handled the helm showed that he knew the tricks of the old ferryman by wind and calm, by high and low river. He had probably learnt them with the photographic accuracy only to be attained when the mind is young.

The boat swung out into the river with an odd jerking movement, which the steersman soon corrected. And a man who had been watching on the bridge half a mile farther down the river hurried into the town. A second watcher at an open window in the tall house next to the Posada de los Reyes on the Paseo del Ebro closed his field-glasses with a thoughtful smile.

It seemed that Don Francisco de Mogente had purposely avoided crossing the bridge, where to this day the night watchman, with lantern and spear, peeps cautiously to and fro—a startlingly mediæval figure. It seemed also that the traveler was expected, though he had performed the last stage of his journey on foot after nightfall.

It is characteristic of this country that Saragossa should be guarded during the day by the toll-takers at every gate, by sentries, and by the new police, while at night the streets are given over to the care of a handful of

night watchmen, who call monotonously to each other all through the hours, and may be avoided by the simplest-minded of malefactors.

Don Francisco de Mogente brought the ferry-boat gently alongside the landing-stage beneath the high wall of the Quay, and made his way through the underground passage and up the dirty steps that lead into one of the narrow streets of the old town.

The moon had broken through the clouds again and shone down upon the barred windows. The traveler stood still and looked about him. Nothing had changed since he had last stood there. Nothing had changed just here for five hundred years or so; for he could not see the domes of the Cathedral of the Pillar, comparatively modern, only a century old.

Don Francisco de Mogente had come from the West; had known the newness of the new generation. And he stood for a moment as if in a dream, breathing in the tainted air of narrow, undrained streets; listening to the cry of the watchman slowly dying as the man walked away from him on sandaled, noiseless feet; gazing up at the barred windows, heavily shadowed. There was an old world stillness in the air, and suddenly the bells of fifty churches tolled the hour. It was one o'clock in the morning. The traveler had traveled backwards, it would seem, into the middle ages. As he heard the church bells he gave an angry upward jerk of the head, as if the sound confirmed a thought that was already in his mind. The bells seemed to be all around him; the towers of the churches seemed to dominate the sleeping city on every side. There was a distinct smell of incense

in the air of these narrow streets, where the winds of the outer world rarely found access.

The traveler knew his way, and hurried down a narrow turning to the left, with the Cathedral of the Pillar between him and the river. He had made a détour in order to avoid the bridge and the Paseo del Ebro, a broad road on the river bank. In these narrow streets he met no one. On the Paseo there are several old inns, notably the Posada de los Reyes, used by muleteers and other gentlemen of the road, who arise and start at any hour of the twenty-four and in summer travel as much by night as by day. At the corner, where the bridge abuts on the Paseo, there is always a watchman at night, while by day there is a guard. It is the busiest and dustiest corner in the city.

Francisco de Mogente crossed a wide street, and again sought a dark alley. He passed by the corner of the Cathedral of the Pillar, and went towards the other and infinitely grander Cathedral of the Seo. Beyond this, by the riverside, is the palace of the archbishop. Farther on is another palace, standing likewise on the Paseo del Ebro, backing likewise on to a labyrinth of narrow streets. It is called the Palacio Sarrion, and belongs to the father and son of that name.

It seemed that Francisco de Mogente was going to the Palacio Sarrion; for he passed the great door of the archbishop's dwelling, and was already looking towards the house of the Sarrions, when a slight sound made him turn on his heels with the rapidity of one whose life had been passed amid dangers—and more especially those that come from behind.

There were three men coming from behind now, run-

ning after him on sandaled feet, and before he could do so much as raise his arm the moon broke out from behind a cloud and showed a gleam of steel. Don Francisco de Mogente was down on the ground in an instant, and the three men fell upon him like dogs on a rat. One knife went right through him, and grated with a harsh squeak on the cobble-stones beneath.

A moment later the traveler was lying there alone, half in the shadow, his dusty feet showing whitely in the moonlight. The three shadows had vanished as softly as they came.

Almost instantly from, strangely enough, the direction in which they had gone the burly form of a preaching friar came out into the light. He was walking hurriedly, and would seem to be returning from some mission of mercy, or some pious bedside to one of the many houses of religion located within a stone's throw of the Cathedral of the Seo in one of the narrow streets of this quarter of the city. The holy man almost fell over the prostrate form of Don Francisco de Mogente.

"Ah! ah!" he exclaimed in an even and quiet voice. "A calamity."

"No," answered the wounded man with a cynicism which even the near sight of death seemed powerless to effect. "A crime."

"You are badly hurt, my son."

"Yes; you had better not try to lift me, though you are a strong man."

"I will go for help," said the monk.

"Lay help," suggested the wounded man curtly. But the friar was already out of earshot.

In an astonishingly short space of time the friar returned, accompanied by two men, who had the air of indoor servants and the quiet movements of street-bred, roof-ridden humanity.

Mindful of his cloth, the friar stood aside, unostentatiously and firmly refusing to take the lead even in a mission of mercy. He stood with humbly-folded hands and a meek face while the two men lifted Don Francisco de Mogente on to a long narrow blanket, the cloak of Navarre and Aragon, which one of them had brought with him.

They bore him slowly away, and the friar lingered behind. The moon shone down brightly into the narrow street and showed a great patch of blood amid the cobblestones. In Saragossa, as in many Spanish cities, certain old men are employed by the municipal authorities to sweep the dust of the streets into little heaps. These heaps remain at the side of the streets until the dogs and the children and the four winds disperse the dust again. It is a survival of the middle ages, interesting enough in its bearing upon the evolution of the modern municipal authority and the transmission of intellectual gifts.

The friar looked round him, and had not far to look. There was a dust heap close by. He plunged his large brown hands into it, and with a few quick movements covered all traces of the calamity of which he had so nearly been a witness.

Then, with a quick, meek look either way, he followed the two men, who had just disappeared round a corner. The street, which, by the way, is called the Calle San Gregorio, was, of course, deserted; the tall

"A MOMENT LATER THE TRAVELER WAS LYING THERE ALONE."

houses on either side were closely shuttered. Many of the balconies bore a branch of palm across the iron railings, the outward sign of priesthood. For the cathedral clergy live here. And, doubtless, the holy men within had been asleep many hours.

Across the end of the Calle San Gregorio, and commanding that narrow street, stood the Palacio Sarrion—an empty house the greater part of the year—a vast building, of which the windows increased in size as they mounted skywards. There were wrought-iron balconies, of which the window embrasures were so deep that the shutters folded sideways into the wall instead of swinging back as in houses of which the walls were of normal thickness.

The friar was probably accustomed to seeing the Palacio Sarrion rigidly shut up. He never, in his quick, humble scrutiny of his surroundings glanced up at it. And, therefore, he never saw a man sitting quietly behind the curiously wrought railings, smoking a cigarette—a man who had witnessed the whole incident from beginning to end. Who had, indeed, seen more than the friar or the two quiet men-servants. For he had seen a stick—probably a sword-stick, such as nearly every Spanish gentleman carries in his own country—fly from the hand of Don Francisco de Mogente at the moment when he was attacked, and fall into the gutter on the darker side of the street, where it lay unheeded. Where, indeed, it still remained when the friar with his swinging gait had turned the corner of the Calle San Gregorio.

CHAPTER II

EVASIO MON

THERE are some people whose presence in a room seems to establish a mental centre of gravity round which other minds hover uneasily, conscious of the dead weight of that attraction.

"I have known Evasio all my life," the Count de Sarrion once said to his son. "I have stood at the edge of that pit and looked in. I do not know to this day whether there is gold at the bottom or mud. I have never quarreled with him, and, therefore, we have never made it up."

Which, perhaps, was as good a description of Evasio Mon as any man had given. He had never quarreled with any one. He was, in consequence, a lonely man. For the majority of human beings are gregarious. They meet together in order to quarrel. The majority of women prefer to sit and squabble round one table to seeking another room. They call it the domestic circle, and spend their time in straining at the family tie in order to prove its strength.

It was Evasio Mon who, standing at the open window of his apartment in the tall house next door to the Posada de los Reyes on the Paseo del Ebro, had observed with the help of a field-glass, that a traveler was cross-

ing the river by the ferry-boat after midnight. He noted the unusual proceeding with a tolerant shrug. It will be remembered that he closed his glasses with a smile—not a smile of amusement or of contempt—not even a deep smile such as people wear in books. It was merely a smile, and could not be construed into anything else by any physiognomist. The wrinkles that made it were deeply marked, which suggested that Evasio Mon had learnt to smile when he was quite young. He had, perhaps, been taught.

And, after all, a man may as well show a smile to the world as a worried look, or a mean look, or one of the countless casts of countenance that are moulded by conceit and vanity. A smile is frequently misconstrued by the simple-hearted into the outward sign of inward kindness. Many think that it conciliates children and little dogs. But that which the many think is usually wrong.

If Evasio Mon's face said anything at all, it warned the world that it had to deal with a man of perfect self-control. And the man who controls himself is usually able to control just so much of his surrounding world as may suit his purpose.

There was something in the set of this man's eyes which suggested no easy victory over self. For his eyes were close together. His hair was almost red. His face was rather narrow and long. It was not the face of an easy-going man as God had made it. But years had made it the face of a man that nothing could rouse. He was of medium height, with rather narrow shoulders, but upright and lithe. He was clean shaven and of a pleasant ruddiness. His eyes were a bluish gray, and looked

out upon the world with a reflective attention through gold-rimmed eye-glasses, with which he had a habit of amusing himself while talking, examining their mechanism and the knot of the fine black cord with a bat-like air of blindness.

In body and mind he seemed to be almost a young man. But Ramon de Sarrion said that he had known him all his life. And the Count de Sarrion had spoken with Christina when that woman was Queen of Spain.

Mon was still astir, although the bells of the Cathedral of the Virgin of the Pillar, immediately behind his house, had struck the half hour. It was more than thirty minutes since the ferry-boat had sidled across the river, and Mon glanced at the clock on his mantelpiece. He expected, it would seem, a sequel to the arrival which had been so carefully noted.

And at last the sequel came. A soft knock, as of fat fingers, made Mon glance towards the door, and bid the knocker enter. The door opened, and in its darkened entry stood the large form of the friar who had rendered such useful aid to a stricken traveler. The light of Mon's lamp showed this holy man to be large and heavy of face, with the narrow forehead of the fanatic. With such a face and head, this could not be a clever man. But he is a wise worker who has tools of different temper in his bag. Too fine a steel may snap. Too delicately fashioned an instrument may turn in the hand when suddenly pressed against the grain.

Mon held out his hand, knowing that there would be no verbal message. From the mysterious folds of the friar's sleeves a letter instantly emerged.

"They have blundered. The man is still living. You had better come," it said; and that was all.

"And what do *you* know of this affair, my brother?" asked Mon, holding the letter to the candle, and, when it was ignited, throwing it on to the cold ashes in the open fireplace, where it burnt.

"Little enough, Excellency. One of the Fathers, praying at his window, heard the sound of a struggle in the street, and I was sent out to see what it signified. I found a man lying on the ground, and, according to instructions, did not touch him, but went back for help."

Mon nodded his compact head thoughtfully.

"And the man said nothing?"

"Nothing, Excellency."

"You are a wise man, my brother. Go, and I will follow you."

The friar's meek face was oily with that smile of complete self-satisfaction which is only found when foolishness and fervour meet in one brain.

Mon rose slowly from his chair and stretched himself. It was evident that had he followed his own inclination he would have gone to bed. He perhaps had a sense of duty. He had not far to go, and knew the shortest ways through the narrow streets. He could hear a muleteer shouting at his beasts on the bridge as he crossed the Calle Don Jaime I. The streets were quiet enough otherwise, and the watchman of this quarter could be heard far away at the corner of the Plaza de la Constitucion calling to the gods that the weather was serene.

Evasio Mon, cloaked to the eyes against the autumn night, hurried down the Calle San Gregorio and turned

into an open doorway that led into the patio of a great four-sided house. He climbed the stone stair and knocked at a door, which was instantly opened.

"Come!" said the man who opened it—a white-haired priest of benevolent face. "He is conscious. He asks for a notary. He is dying! I thought you ——"

"No," replied Mon quickly. "He would recognise me, though he has not seen me for twenty years. You must do it. Change your clothes."

He spoke as with authority, and the priest fingered the silken cord around his waist.

"I know nothing of the law," he said hesitatingly.

"That I have thought of. Here are two forms of will. They are written so small as to be almost illegible. This one we must get signed if we can; but, failing that, the other will do. You see the difference. In this one the pin is from left to right; in that, from right to left. I will wait here while you change your clothes. As emergencies arise we will meet them."

He spoke the last sentence coldly, and followed with his narrow gaze the movements of the old priest, who was laying aside his cassock.

"Let us have no panics," Evasio Mon's manner seemed to say. And his air was that of a quiet pilot knowing his way through the narrow waters that lay ahead.

In a small room near at hand, Francisco de Mogente was facing death. He lay half dressed upon a narrow bed. On a table near at hand stood a basin, a bottle, and a few evidences of surgical aid. But the doctor had

gone. Two friars were in the room. One was praying; the other was the big, strong man who had first succoured the wounded traveler.

"I asked for a notary," said Mogente curtly. Death had not softened him. He was staring straight in front of him with glassy eyes, thinking deeply and quickly. At times his expression was one of wonder, as if a conviction forced itself upon his mind from time to time against his will and despite the growing knowledge that he had no time to waste in wondering.

"The notary has been sent for. He cannot delay in coming," replied the friar. "Rather give your thoughts to Heaven, my son, than to notaries."

"Mind your own business," replied Mogente quietly. As he spoke the door opened and an old man came in. He had papers and a quill pen in his hand.

"You sent for me—a notary," he said. Evasio Mon stood in the doorway a yard behind the dying man's head. The notary moved the table so that in looking at his client he could, with the corner of his eye, see also the face of Evasio Mon.

"You wish to make a statement or a last testament?" said the notary.

"A statement—no. It is useless since they have killed me. I will make a statement . . . Elsewhere."

And his laugh was not pleasant to the ear.

"A will—yes," he continued—and hearing the notary dip his pen—

"My name," he said, "is Francisco de Mogente."

"Of?" inquired the notary, writing.

"Of this city. You cannot be a notary of Saragossa or you would know that."

"I am not a notary of Saragossa—go on."

"Of Saragossa and Santiago de Cuba. And I have a great fortune to leave."

One of the praying friars made a little involuntary movement. The love of money perhaps hid itself beneath the brown hood of the mendicant. The man who spoke was dying; already his breath came short.

"Give me," he said, "some cordial, or I shall not last."

After a pause he went on.

"There is a will in existence which I now cancel. I made it when I was a younger man. I left my fortune to my son Leon de Mogente. To my daughter Juanita de Mogente I left a sufficiency. I wish now to make a will in favour of my son Leon"—he paused while the notary's quill pen ran over the paper—"on one condition."

"On one condition"—wrote the notary, who had leant forward, but sat upright rather suddenly in obedience to a signal from Evasio Mon in the doorway. He had forgotten his tonsure.

"That he does not go into religion—that he devotes no part of it to the benefit or advantage of the church."

The notary sat very straight while he wrote this down.

"My son is in Saragossa," said Mogente suddenly, with a change of manner. "I will see him. Send for him."

The notary glanced up at Evasio Mon, who shook his head.

"I cannot send for him at two in the morning."

"Then I will sign no will."

"Sign the will now," suggested the lawyer, with a look of doubt towards the dark doorway behind the sick man's head. "Sign now, and see your son to-morrow."

"There is no to-morrow, my friend. Send for my son at once."

Mon grudgingly nodded his head.

"It is well, I will do as you wish," said the notary, only too glad, it would seem, to rise and go into the next room to receive further minute instructions from his chief.

The dying man laid with closed eyes, and did not move until his son spoke to him. Leon de Mogente was a sparely-built man, with a white and oddly-rounded forehead. His eyes were dark, and he betrayed scarcely any emotion at the sight of his father in this lamentable plight.

"Ah!" said the elder man. "It is you. You look like a monk. Are you one?"

"Not yet," answered the pale youth in a low voice with a sort of suppressed exultation. Evasio Mon, watching him from the doorway, smiled faintly. He seemed to have no misgivings as to what Leon might say.

"But you wish to become one?"

"It is my dearest desire."

The dying man laughed. "You are like your mother," he said. "She was a fool. You may go back to bed, my friend."

"But I would rather stay here and pray by your bed-

side," pleaded the son. He was a feeble man—the only weak man, it would appear, in the room.

"Then stay and pray if you want to," answered Mogente, without even troubling himself to show contempt.

The notary was at his table again, and seemed to seek his cue by an upward glance.

"You will, perhaps, leave your fortune," he suggested at length, "to—to some good work."

But Evasio Mon was shaking his head.

"To—to—?" began the notary once more, and then lapsed into a puzzled silence. He was at fault again. Mogente seemed to be failing. He lay quite still, looking straight in front of him.

"The Count Ramon de Sarrion," he asked suddenly, "is he in Saragossa?"

"No," answered the notary, after a glance into the darkened door. "No—but your will—your will. Try and remember what you are doing. You wish to leave your money to your son?"

"No, no."

"Then to—your daughter?"

And the question seemed to be directed, not towards the bed, but behind it.

"To your daughter?" he repeated more confidently. "That is right, is it not? To your daughter?"

Mogente nodded his head.

"Write it out shortly," he said in a low and distinct voice. "For I will sign nothing that I have not read, word for word, and I have but little time."

The notary took a new sheet of paper and wrote out

in bold and, it is to be presumed, unlegal terms that Francisco de Mogente left his earthly possessions to Juanita de Mogente, his only daughter. Being no notary, this elderly priest wrote out a plain-spoken document, about which there could be no doubt whatever in any court of law in the world, which is probably more than a lawyer could have done.

Francisco de Mogente read the paper, and then, propped in the arms of the big friar, he signed his name to it. After this he lay quite still, so still that at last the notary, who stood watching him, slowly knelt down and fell to praying for the soul that was gone.

CHAPTER III

WITHIN THE HIGH WALLS

In these degenerate days Saragossa has taken to itself a suburb—the first and deadliest sign of a city's progress. Thirty years ago, however, Torrero did not exist, and those terrible erections of white stone and plaster which now disfigure the high land to the south of the city had not yet burst upon the calm of ancient architectural Spain. Here, on Monte Torrero, stood an old convent, now turned into a barrack. Here also, amid the trees of the ancient gardens, rises the rounded dome of the church of San Fernando.

Close by, and at a slightly higher level, curves the Canal Imperial, 400 years old, and not yet finished; assuredly conceived by a Moorish love of clear water in high places, but left to Spanish enterprise and in completeness when the Moors had departed.

Beyond the convent walls, the canal winds round the slope of the brown hill, marking a distinctive line between the outer desert and the green oasis of Saragossa. Just within the border line of the oasis, just below the canal, on the sunny slope, lies the long low house of the Convent School of the Sisters of the True Faith. Here, amid the quiet of orchards—white in spring with blossom, the haunt of countless nightingales, heavy with fruit in

autumn, at all times the home of a luxuriant vegetation —history has surged to and fro, like the tides drawn hither and thither, rising and falling according to the dictates of a far-off planet. And the moon of this tide is Rome.

For the Sisters of the True Faith are a Jesuit corporation, and their Convent School is, now a convent, now a school, as the tide may rise or fall. The ebb first came in 1555, when Spain threw out the Jesuits. The flow was at its height so late as 1814, when Ferdinand VII —a Bourbon, of course—restored Jesuitism and the Inquisition at one stroke. And before and after, and through all these times, the tide of prosperity has risen and fallen, has sapped and sagged and undermined with a noiseless energy which the outer world only half suspects.

In 1835 this same long, low, quiet house amid the fruit-trees was sacked by the furious populace, and more than one Sister of the True Faith, it is whispered, was beaten to the ground as she fled shrieking down the hill. In 1836 all monastic orders were rigidly suppressed by Mendizabal, minister to Queen Christina. In 1851 they were all allowed to live again by the same Queen's daughter, Isabel II. So wags this world into which there came nineteen hundred years ago not peace, but a sword; a world all stirred about by a reformed rake of Spain who, in his own words, came "to send fire throughout the earth;" whose motto was, "*Ignem veni metteri in terram, et quid volo nisi ut accendatur.*"

The road that runs by the bank of the canal was deserted when the Count de Sarrion turned his horse's head that way from the dusty high road leading south-

wards out of Saragossa. Sarrion had only been in Saragossa twenty-four hours. His great house on the Paseo del Ebro had not been thrown open for this brief visit, and he had been content to inhabit two rooms at the back of the house. From the balcony of one he had seen the incident related in the last chapter; and as he rode towards the convent school he carried in his hand—not a whip—but the delicately-wrought sword-stick which had fallen from the hand of Francisco de Mogente into the gutter the night before.

In the grassy sedge that bordered the canal the frogs were calling to each other with that conversational note of interrogation in their throats which makes their music one of Nature's most sociable and companionable sounds. In the fruit-trees on the lower land the nightingales were singing as they only sing in Spain. It was nearly dark, a warm evening of late spring, and there was no wind. Amid the thousand scents of blossom, of opening buds, and a hundred flowering shrubs there arose the subtle, soft odour of sluggish water, stirred by frogs, telling of cool places beneath the trees where the weary and the dusty might lie in oblivion till the morning.

The Count of Sarrion rode with a long stirrup, his spare form, six feet in height, a straight line from heel to shoulder. His seat in the saddle and something in his manner, at once gentle and cold, something mystic that attracted and yet held inexorably at arm's length, lent at once a deeper meaning to his name, which assuredly had a Moorish ring in it. The little town of Sarrion lies far to the south, on the borders of Valencia, in the heart of the Moorish country. And to look at the face of Ramon

de Sarrion and of his son, the still, brown-faced Marcos de Sarrion, was to conjure up some old romance of that sun-scorched height of the Javalambre, where history dates back to centuries before Christ—where assuredly some Moslem maiden in the later time must have forsaken all for love of a wild yet courteous Spanish knight of Sarrion, bequeathing to her sons through all the ages the deep, reflective eyes, the impenetrable dignity, of her race.

Sarrion's hair was gray. He wore a moustache and imperial in the French fashion, and looked at the world with the fierce eyes and somewhat of the air of an eagle, which resemblance was further accentuated by a finely-cut nose. As an old man he was picturesque. He must have been very handsome in his youth.

It seemed that he was bound for the School of the Sisters of the True Faith, for as he approached its gate, built solidly within the thickness of the high wall, without so much as a crack or crevice through which the curious might peep, he drew rein, and sat motionless on his well-trained horse, listening. The clock at San Fernando immediately vouchsafed the information that it was nine o'clock. There was no one astir, no one on the road before or behind him. Across the narrow canal was a bare field. The convent wall bounded the view on the left hand.

Sarrion rode up to the gate and rang a bell, which clanged with a sort of surreptitiousness just within. He only rang once, and then waited, posting himself immediately opposite a little grating let into the solid wood of the door. The window behind the grating seemed

to open and shut without sound, for he heard nothing until a woman's voice asked who was there.

"It is the Count Ramon de Sarrion who must without fail speak to the Sister Superior to-night," he answered, and composed himself again in the saddle with a southern patience. He waited a long time before the heavy doors were at length opened. The horse passed timorously within, with jerking ears and a distended nostril, looking from side to side. He glanced curiously at the shadowy forms of two women who held the door, and leant their whole weight against it to close it again as soon as possible.

Sarrion dismounted, and drew the bridle through a ring and hook attached to the wall just inside the gates. No one spoke. The two nuns noiselessly replaced the heavy bolts. There was a muffled clank of large keys, and they led the way towards the house.

Just over the threshold was the small room where visitors were asked to wait—a square, bare apartment with one window set high in the wall, with one lamp burning dimly on the table now. There were three or four chairs, and that was all. The bare walls were whitewashed. The Convent School of the Sisters of the True Faith did not err, at all events, in the heathen indiscretion of a too free hospitality. The visitors to this room were barely beneath the roof. The door had in one of its panels the usual grating and shutter.

Sarrion sat down without looking round him, in the manner of a man who knew his surroundings, and took no interest in them.

In a few minutes the door opened noiselessly—there

was a too obtrusive noiselessness within these walls—and a nun came in. She was tall, and within the shadow of her cap her eyes loomed darkly. She closed the door, and, throwing back her veil, came forward. She leant towards Sarrion, and kissed him, and her face, coming within the radius of the lamp, was the face of a Sarrion.

There was in her action, in the movement of her high-held head, a sudden and startling self-abandonment of affection. For Spanish women understand above all others the calling of love and motherhood. And it seemed that Sor Teresa—known in the world as Dolores Sarrion—had, like many women, bestowed a thwarted love—*faute de mieux*—upon her brother.

"You are well?" asked Sarrion, looking at her closely. Her face, framed by a spotless cap, was gray and drawn, but not unhappy.

She nodded her head with a smile, while her eyes flitted over his face and person with that quick interrogation which serves better than words. A woman never asks minutely after the health of one in whom she is really interested. She knows without asking. She stood before him with her hands crossed within the folds of her ample sleeves. Her face was lost again in the encircling shadow of her cap and veil. She was erect and motionless in her stiff and heavy clothing. The momentary betrayal of womanhood and affection was passed, and this was the dreaded Sister Superior of the Convent School again.

"I suppose," she said, "you are alone as usual. Is it safe, after nightfall—you, who have so many enemies?"

"Marcos is at Torre Garda, where I left him three

days ago. The snows are melting and the fishing is good. It is unusual to come at this hour, I know, but I came for a special purpose."

He glanced towards the door. The quiet of this house seemed to arouse a sense of suspicion and antagonism in his mind.

"I wished, of course, to see you also, though I am aware that the affections are out of place in this—holy atmosphere."

She winced almost imperceptibly and said nothing.

"I want to see Juanita de Mogente," said the Count. "It is unusual, I know, but in this place you are all-powerful. It is important, or I should not ask it."

"She is in bed. They go to bed at eight o'clock."

"I know. Is not that all the better? She has a room to herself, I recollect. You can arouse her and bring her to me and no one need know that she has had a visitor—except, I suppose, the peeping eyes that haunt a nunnery corridor."

He gave a shrug of the shoulder.

"Mother of God!" he exclaimed. "The air of secrecy infects one. I am not a secretive man. All the world knows my opinions. And here am I plotting like a friar. Can I see Juanita?"

And he laughed quietly as he looked at his sister.

"Yes, I suppose so."

He nodded his thanks.

"And, Dolores, listen!" he said. "Let me see her alone. It may save complications in the future. You understand?"

Sor Teresa turned in the doorway and looked at him.

He could not see the expression of her eyes, which were in deep shadow, and she left him wondering whether she had understood or not.

It would seem that Sor Teresa, despite her slow dignity of manner, was a quick person. For in a few moments the door of the waiting-room was again opened and a young girl hastened breathlessly in. She was not more than sixteen or seventeen, and as she came in she threw back her dark hair with one hand.

"I was asleep, Uncle Ramon," she exclaimed with a light laugh, "and the good Sister had to drag me out of bed before I would wake up. And then, of course, I thought it was a fire. We have always hoped for a fire, you know."

She was continuing to attend to her hasty dress as she spoke, tying the ribbon at the throat of her gay dressing-gown with careless fingers.

"I had not even time to pull up my stockings," she concluded, making good the omission with a friendly nonchalance. Then she turned to look at Sor Teresa, but her eyes found instead the closed door.

"Oh!" she cried, "the good Sister has forgotten to come back with me. And it is against the rules. What a joke! We are not allowed to see visitors alone—except father or mother, you know. I don't care. It was not my fault."

And she looked doubtfully from the door to Sarrion and back again to the door. She was very young and gay and careless. Her cheeks still flushed by the deep sleep of childhood were of the colour of a peach that has ripened quickly in the glow of a southern sun. Her

eyes were dark and very bright; the bird-like shallow vivacity of childhood still sparkled in them. It seemed that they were made for laughing, not for tears or thought. She was the incarnation of youth and spring-time. To find such ignorance of the world, such innocence of heart, one must go to a nunnery or to Nature.

"I came to see you to-night," said Sarrion, "as I may be leaving Saragossa again to-morrow morning."

"And the good Sister allowed me to see you. I wonder why! She has been cross with me lately. I am always breaking things, you know."

She spread out her hands with a gesture of despair.

"Yesterday it was an altar-vase. I tripped over the foot of that stupid St. Andrew. Have you heard from papa?"

Sarrion hesitated for a moment at the sudden question.

"No," he answered at length.

"Oh! I wish he would come home from Cuba," said the girl, with a passing gravity. "I wonder what he will be like. Will his hair be gray? Not that I dislike gray hair you know," she added hurriedly. "I hope he will be nice. One of the girls told me the other day that she disliked her father, which seems odd, doesn't it? Milagros de Villanueva—do you know her? She was my friend once. We told each other everything. She has red hair. I thought it was golden when she was my friend. But one can see with half an eye that it is red."

Sarrion laughed rather shortly.

"Have you heard from your father?" he asked.

"I had a letter on Saint Mark's Day," she answered. "I have not heard from him since. He said he hoped

to give me a surprise, he trusted a pleasant one, during the summer. What did he mean? Do you know?"

"No," answered Sarrion, thoughtfully. "I know nothing."

"And Marcos is not with you?" the girl went on gaily. "He would not dare to come within the walls. He is afraid of all nuns. I know he is, though he denies it. Some day, in the holidays, I shall dress as a nun, and you will see. It will frighten him out of his wits."

"Yes," said Sarrion looking at her, "I expect it would. Tell me," he went on after a pause, "do you know this stick?"

And he held out, under the rays of the lamp, the sword-stick he had picked up in the Calle San Gregorio.

She looked at it and then at him with startled eyes.

"Of course," she said. "It is the sword-stick I sent papa for the New Year. You ordered it yourself from Toledo. See, here is the crest. Where did you get it? Do not mystify me. Tell me quickly—is he here? Has he come home?"

In her eagerness she laid her hands on his dusty riding coat and looked up into his face.

"No, my child, no," answered Sarrion, stroking her hair, with a tenderness unusual enough to be remembered afterwards. "I think not. The stick must have been stolen from him and found its way back to Saragossa in the hand of the thief. I picked it up in the street yesterday. It is a coincidence, that is all. I will write to your father and tell him of it."

Sarrion turned away, so that the shade of the lamp

threw his face into darkness. He was afraid of those quick, bright eyes—almost afraid that she should divine that he had already telegraphed to Cuba.

"I only came to ask you whether you had heard from your father and to hear that you were well. And now I must go."

She stood looking at him, thoughtfully pulling at the delicate embroidery of her sleeves, for all that she wore was of the best that Saragossa could provide, and she wore it carelessly, as if she had never known other, and paid little heed to wealth—as those do who have always had it.

"I think there is something you are not telling me," she said, with the ever-ready laugh twinkling beneath her dusky lashes. "Some mystery."

"No, no. Good-night, my child. Go back to your bed."

She paused with her hand on the door, looking back, her face all shaded by her tumbled hair hanging to her waist.

"Are you sure you have not heard from papa?"

"Quite sure—! I wish I had," he added when the door was closed behind her.

CHAPTER IV

THE JADE—CHANCE

THE same evening, by the light of his solitary lamp, in the small room—which had been a lady's boudoir in olden days—the Count de Sarrion sat down to write a letter to his son. He despatched it at once by a rider to Torre Garda, far beyond Pampeluna, on the southern slope of the Pyrenees.

"I am growing too old for this work," he said to himself as he sealed the letter. "It wants a younger man. Marcos will do it, though he hates the pavement. There is something of the chase in it, and Marcos is a hunter."

At his call a man came into the room, all dusty and sunburnt, a typical man of Aragon, dry and wrinkled, burnt like a son of Sahara. His clothing, like his face, was dust-coloured. He wore knee-breeches of home-spun, brown stockings, a handkerchief that had once been coloured bound round his head, with the knot over his left ear. He was startlingly rough and wild in appearance, but his features, on examination, were refined, and his eyes intelligent.

"I want you to go straight to Torre Garda with this letter, and give it into the hand of my son with your own hand. It is important. You may be watched and followed; you understand?"

The man nodded. They are a taciturn people in

Aragon and Navarre—so taciturn that in politely greeting the passer on the road they cut down the curt good-day. "Buenas," they say, and that is all.

"Go with God," said the Count, and the messenger left the room noiselessly, for they wear no shoe-leather in this dry land.

There was a train in those days to Pampeluna and a daily post, but then, as now, a letter of any importance is better sent by hand, while the railway is still looked upon with suspicion by the authorities as a means of circulating malcontents and spreading crime. Every train is still inspected at each stopping place by two of the civil guards.

The Count was early astir the next morning. He knew that a man such as Marcos, possessing the instinct of the chase and that deep insight into the thoughts and actions of others, even into the thoughts and actions of animals, which makes a great hunter or a great captain, would never have let slip the feeble clue that he had of the incident in the Calle San Gregorio. The Count had been a politician in his youth, and his position entailed a passive continuance of the policy he had actively advocated in earlier days. But as an old sailor, weary with the battle of many storms, learns at last to treat the thunder and the tempest with a certain tolerant contempt, so he, having passed through evil monarchies and corrupt regencies, through the storm of anarchy and the humiliation of a brief and ridiculous republic, now stood aside and watched the waves go past him with a semi-contemptuous indifference.

He was too well known in the streets of Saragossa to

wander hither and thither in them, making inquiry as to whether any had seen his lifelong friend Francisco de Mogente back in the city of his birth from which he had been exiled in the uncertain days of Isabella. Francisco de Mogente had been placed in one of those vague positions of Spanish political life where exile had never been commuted, though friend and enemy would alike have welcomed the return of a scapegoat on their own terms. But Mogente had never been the man to make terms—any more than this grim Spanish nobleman who now sat wondering what his next move must be.

After his early coffee Sarrion went out into the Calle San Gregorio. The sound of deep voices chanting the matins came to him through the open doors of the Cathedral of the Seo. A priest hurried past, late, and yet in time to save his record of services attended. The beggars were leisurely making their way to the cathedral doors, too lazy to make an earlier start, philosophically reflecting that the charitable are as likely to give after matins as before.

The Count went over the ground of the scene that he had witnessed in the fitful moonlight. Here the man who might have been Francisco de Mogente had turned on his heel. Here, at the never opened door of a deserted palace, he had stood for a moment fighting with his back to the wall. Here he had fallen. From that corner had come aid in the person—Sarrion was sure—of a friar. It was an odd coincidence, for the Church had never been the friend of the exiled man, and it was in the days of a priest-ridden Queen that his foes had triumphed.

They had carried the stricken man back to the corner of the Calle San Gregorio and the Plazuela San Bruno, and from the movements of the bearers Sarrion had received the conviction that they had entered the house immediately beyond the angle of the high building opposite to the Episcopal Palace.

Sarrion followed his memory step by step. He determined to go into the house—a huge building—divided into many small apartments. The door had never particularly attracted his attention. Like many of the doorways of these great houses, it was wide and high, giving access to a dark stairway of stone. The doors stood open night and day. For this stairway was a common one, as its dirtiness would testify.

There was some one coming down the stairs now. Sarrion, remembering that his face was well known, and that he had no particular business in any of the apartments into which the house was divided, paused for a moment, and waited on the threshold. He looked up the dark stairs, and slowly distinguished the form and face of the newcomer. It was his old friend Evasio Mon—smart, well-brushed, smiling a good-morning to all the world this sunny day.

They had not met for many years. Their friendship had been one of those begun by parents, and carried on in after years by the children more from habit than from any particular tie of sympathy. For we all find at length that the nursery carpet is not the world. Their ways had parted soon after the nursery, and, though they had met frequently, they had never trodden the same path again. For Evasio Mon had been educated as a priest.

"I have often wondered why I have never clashed—with Evasio Mon," Sarrion once said to his son in the reflective quiet of their life at Torre Garda.

"It takes two to clash," replied Marcos at length in his contemplative way, having given the matter his consideration. And perhaps that was the only explanation of it.

Sarrion looked up now and met the smile with a grave bow. They took off their hats to each other with rather more ceremony than when they had last met. A long, slow friendship is the best; a long, slow enmity the deadliest.

"One does not expect to see you in Saragossa," said Mon gently. A man bears his school mark all through life. This layman had learnt something in the seminary which he had never forgotten.

"No," replied the other. "What is this house? I was just going into it."

Mon turned and looked up at the building with a little wave of the hand, indicating lightly the stones and mortar.

"It is just a house, my friend, as you see—a house, like another."

"And who lives in it?"

"Poor people, and foolish people. As in any other. People one must pity and cannot help despising."

He laughed, and as he spoke he led the way, as it were, unconsciously away from this house which was like another.

"Because they are poor?" inquired Sarrion, who did not move a step in response to Evasio Mon's lead.

"Partly," admitted Mon, holding up one finger. "Because, my friend, none but the foolish are poor in this world."

"Then why has the good God sent so many fools into the world?"

"Because He wants a few saints, I suppose."

Mon was still trying to lead him away from that threshold and Sarrion still stood his ground. Their half-bantering talk suddenly collapsed, and they stood looking at each other in silence for a moment. Both were what may be called "ready" men, quick to catch a thought and answer.

"I will tell you," said Sarrion quietly, "why I am going into this house. I have long ceased to take an interest in the politics of this poor country, as you know."

Mon's gesture seemed to indicate that Sarrion had only done what was wise and sensible in a matter of which it was no longer any use to talk.

"But to my friends I still give a thought," went on the Count. "Two nights ago a man was attacked in this street—by the usual street cutthroats, it is to be supposed. I saw it all from my balcony there. See, from this corner you can perceive the balcony."

He drew Mon to the corner of the street, and pointed out the Sarrion Palace, gloomy and deserted at the further end of the street.

"But it was dark, and I could not see much," he added, seeming unconsciously to answer a question passing in his companion's mind; for Mon's pleasant eyes were measuring the distance.

"I thought they brought him in here; for before I could descend help came, and the cutthroats ran away."

"It is like your good, kind heart, my friend, to interest yourself in the fate of some rake, who was probably tipsy, or else he would not have been abroad at that hour."

"I had not mentioned the hour."

"One presumes," said Mon, with a short laugh, "that such incidents do not happen in the early evening. However, let us by all means make inquiries after your dissipated protégé."

He moved with alacrity to the house, leading the way now.

"By an odd chance," said Sarrion, following him more slowly, "I have conceived the idea that this man is an old friend of mine."

"Then, my good Ramon, he must be an old friend of mine, too."

"Francisco de Mogente."

Mon stopped with a movement of genuine surprise, followed instantly by a quick sidelong glance beneath his lashes.

"Our poor, wrong-headed Francisco," he said, "what made you think of him after all these years? Have you heard from him?"

He turned on the stairs as he asked this question in an indifferent voice and waited for the answer; but Sarrion was looking at the steps with a deep attention.

"See," he said, "there are drops of blood on the stairs. There was blood in the street, but it had been covered with dust. This also has been covered with dust—but the dust may be swept aside—see!"

And with the gloves which a Spanish gentleman still carries in his hand whenever he is out of doors, he brushed the dust aside.

"Yes," said Mon, examining the steps, "yes; you may be right. Come, let us make inquiries. I know most of the people in this house. They are poor people. In my small way I help some of them, when an evil time comes in the winter."

He was all eagerness now, and full of desire to help. It was he who told the Count's story, and told it a little wrong as a story is usually related by one who repeats it, while Sarrion stood at the door and looked around him. It was Mon who persisted that every stone should be turned, and every denizen of the great house interrogated. But nothing resulted from these inquiries.

"I did not, of course, mention Francisco's name," he said, confidentially, as they emerged into the street again. "Nothing was to be gained by that. And I confess I think you are the victim of your own imagination in this. Francisco is in Santiago de Cuba, and will probably never return. If he were here in Saragossa surely his own son would know it. I saw Leon de Mogente the day before yesterday, by the way, and he said nothing of his father. And it is not long since I spoke with Juanita. We could make inquiry of Leon —but not to-day, by the way. It is a great Retreat, organised by some pilgrims to the Shrine of our Lady of the Pillar, and Leon is sure to be of it. The man is half a monk, you know."

They were walking down the Calle San Gregorio, and, as if in illustration of the fact that chance will

betray those who wait most assiduously upon her, the curtain of the great door of the cathedral was drawn aside, and Leon de Mogente came out blinking into the sunlight. The meeting was inevitable.

"There is Leon—by a lucky chance," said Mon almost immediately.

Leon de Mogente had seen them and was hurrying to meet them. Seen thus in the street, under the sun, he was a pale and bloodless man—food for the cloister. He bowed with an odd humility to Mon, but spoke directly to the Count de Sarrion. He knew, and showed that he knew, that Mon was not glad to see him.

"I did not know that you were in Saragossa," he said. "A terrible thing has happened. My father is dead. He died without the benefits of the Church. He returned secretly to Saragossa two days ago and was attacked and robbed in the streets."

"And died in that house," added Sarrion, indicating with his stick the building they had just quitted.

"Ye—es," answered Leon hesitatingly, with a quick and frightened glance at Mon. "It may have been. I do not know. He died without the consolation of the Church. It is that that I think of."

"Yes," said Sarrion rather coldly, "you naturally would."

CHAPTER V

A PILGRIMAGE

EVASIO MON was a great traveler. In Eastern countries a man who makes the pilgrimage to Mecca adds thereafter to his name a title which carries with it not only the distinction conferred upon the dullest by the sight of other men and countries, but the bearer stands high among the elect.

If many pilgrimages could confer a title, this gentle-mannered Spaniard would assuredly have been thus decorated. He had made almost every pilgrimage that the Church may dictate—that wise old Church, which fills so well its vocation in the minds of the restless and the unsatisfied. He had been many times to Rome. He could tell you the specific properties of every shrine in the Roman Catholic world. He made a sort of speciality in latter-day miracles.

Did this woman want a son to put a graceful finish to her family of daughters, he could tell her of some little-known pilgrimage in the mountains which rarely failed.

"Go," he would say. "Go there, and say your prayer. It is the right thing to do. The air of the mountains is delightful. The journey diverts the mind."

In all of which he was quite right. And it was not for him, any more than it is for the profane reader, to

inquire why latter-day miracles are nearly always performed at or near popular health resorts.

Was another in grief, Evasio Mon would send him on a long journey to a gay city, where the devout are not without worldly diversion in the evenings.

Neither was it upon hearsay only that he prescribed. He had been to all these places, and tested them perhaps, which would account for his serene demeanour and that even health which he seemed to enjoy. He had traveled without perturbment, it would seem, for his journeys had left no wrinkles on his bland forehead, neither was the light of restlessness in his quiet eyes.

He must have seen many cities, but cities are nearly all alike, and they grow more alike every day. Many men also must he have met, but they seemed to have rubbed against him and left him unmarked—as sandstone may rub against a diamond. It is upon the sandstone that the scratch remains. He was not part of all that he had seen, which may have meant that he looked not at men or cities, but right through them, to something beyond, upon which his gaze was always fixed.

Living as he did, in a city possessing so great a shrine as that of the "Virgen del Pilar," the scene of a vision accorded to St. James when traveling through Spain, Mon naturally interested himself in the pilgrims, who came from all parts of the world to worship in the cathedral, who may be seen at any hour kneeling in the dim light of flickering candles before the altar rails.

Mon's apartment, indeed, in the tall house next door to the Posada de los Reyes on the Paseo del Ebro was a known resort of the more cultured of the pilgrims, of

those who came from afar; from Rome and from the farthest limits of the Roman Church—from Warsaw to Minnesota.

Evasio Mon had friends also among the humble and such as sheltered in the Posada de los Reyes, which itself was a typical Spanish hostelry, and one of those houses of the road in which the traveler is lucky if he finds the bedrooms all occupied; for then he may, without giving offense, sleep more comfortably in the hayloft. Here, night and day, the clink of bells and the gruff admonition of refractory mules told of travel, and the constant come and go of strange, wild-looking men from the remoter corners of Aragon, far up by the foothills of the Pyrenees. The huge two-wheeled carts drawn by six, eight or ten mules, came lumbering through the dust at all hours of the twenty-four, bringing the produce of the greener lands to this oasis of the Aragonese desert. Some came from other oases in the salt and stony plains where once an inland sea covered all, while the others hailed from the north where the Sierras de Guara rise merging into the giant Pyrenees.

Many of these drivers made their way up the stairs of the house where Evasio Mon lived his quiet life, and gave a letter or merely a verbal message, remembered faithfully through the long and dusty journey, to the man who, though no priest himself, seemed known to every priest in Spain. These letters and messages were nearly always from the curate of some distant village, and told as often as not of a cheerful hopefulness in the work.

Sometimes the good men themselves would come, sitting humbly beneath the hood of the great cart, or riding

a mule, far enough in front to avoid the dust, and yet near enough for company. This was more especially in the month of February, at the anniversary of the miraculous appearance, at which time the graven image set up in the cathedral is understood to be more amenable to supplication than at any other. And, having accomplished their pilgrimage, the simple churchmen turned quite naturally to the house that stood adjoining the cathedral. There, they were always sure of a welcome and of an invitation to lunch or dinner, when they were treated to the very best the city could afford, and, while keeping strictly within the letter of the canonical law, could feast their hearty country appetites even in Lent.

Mon so arranged his journeys that he should be away from Saragossa in the great heats of the summer and autumn, which wise precaution was rendered the easier by the dates of the other great festivals which he usually attended. For it will be found that the miracles and other events attractive to the devout nearly always happen at that season of the year which is most suitable to the environments. Thus the traditions of the Middle Ages fixed the month of February for Saragossa when it is pleasant to be in a city, and September for Montserrat —to quote only one instance—at which time the cool air of the mountains is most to be appreciated.

Evasio Mon, however, was among those who deemed it wise to avoid the great festival at Montserrat by making his pilgrimage earlier in the summer, when the number of the devout was more restricted and their quality more select. Scores of thousands of the very poorest in the land flock to the monastery in September, turning

the mountain into a picnic ground and the festival into a fair.

Mon never knew when the spirit would move him to make this pleasant journey, but his preparations for it must have been made in advance, and his departure by an early train the day after meeting his old friend the Count de Sarrion was probably sudden to every one except himself.

He left the train at Lérida, going on foot from the station to the town, but he did not seek an hotel. He had a friend, it appeared, whose house was open to him, in the Spanish way, who lived near the church in the long, narrow street which forms nearly the whole town of Lérida. In Navarre and Aragon the train service is not quite up to modern requirements. There is usually one passenger train in either direction during the day, though between the larger cities this service has of late years been doubled. It was afternoon, and the hour of the siesta, when Evasio Mon walked through the narrow streets of this ancient city.

Although the sun was hot, and all nature lay gasping beneath it, the streets were unusually busy, and in the shades of the arcades at the corner of the market-place, at the corner of the bridge, and by the bank of the river, where the low wall is rubbed smooth by the trousers of the indolent, men stood in groups and talked in a low voice. It is not too much to state that the only serene face in the streets was that of Evasio Mon, who went on his way with the absorbed smile which is usually taken in England to indicate the Christian virtues, and is associated as often as not with Dissent.

The men of Lérida—a simpler, more agricultural race than the Navarrese—were disturbed; and, indeed, these were stirring times in Spain. These men knew what might come at any moment, for they had been born in stirring times and their fathers before them. Stirring times had reigned in this country for a hundred years. Ferdinand VII—the beloved, the dupe of Napoleon the Great, the god of all Spain from Irun to San Roque, and one of the thorough-paced scoundrels whom God has permitted to sit on a throne—had bequeathed to his country a legacy of strife, which was now bearing fruit.

For not only Aragon, but all Spain was at this time in the most unfortunate position in which a nation or a man—and, above all, a woman—can find herself—she did not know what she wanted.

On one side was Catalonia, republican, fiery, democratic, and independent; on the other, Navarre, more priest-ridden than Rome herself, with every man a Carlist and every woman that which her confessor told her to be. In the south, Andalusia only asked to be left alone to go her own sunny, indifferent way to the limbo of the great nations. Which way should Aragon turn? In truth, the men of Aragon knew not themselves.

Stirring times indeed; for the news had just penetrated to far remote Lérida that the two greatest nations of Europe were at each other's throats. It was a long cry from Ems to Lérida, and the talkers on the shady side of the market-place knew little of what was passing on the banks of the Rhine.

Stirring times, too, were nearer at hand across the Mediterranean. For things were approaching a dead-

lock on the Tiber, and that river, too, must, it seemed, flow with blood before the year ran out. For the greatest catastrophe that the Church has had to face was preparing in the new and temporary capital of Italy; and all men knew that the word must soon go forth from Florence telling the monarch of the Vatican that he must relinquish Rome or fight for it.

Spain, in her awkward search for a king hither and thither over Europe, had thrown France and Germany into war. And Evasio Mon probably knew of the historic scene at Ems as soon as any man in the Peninsula; for history will undoubtedly show, when a generation or so has passed away, that the latter stages of Napoleon's declaration of war were hurried on by priestly intrigue. It will be remembered that Bismarck was the deadliest and cleverest foe that Jesuitism has had.

Mon knew what the talkers in the market-place were saying to each other. He probably knew what they were afraid to say to each other. For Spain was still seeking a king—might yet set other nations by the ears. The Republic had been tried and had miserably failed. There was yet a Don Carlos, a direct descendant of the brother whom Ferdinand the beloved cheated out of his throne. There was a Don Carlos. Why not Don Carlos, since we seek a king? the men in the Phrygian caps were saying to each other. And that was what Mon wanted them to say.

After dark he came out into the streets again, cloaked to the lips against the evening air. He went to the large café by the river, and there seemed to meet many acquaintances.

The next morning he continued his journey, by road now, and on horseback. He sat a horse well, but not with that comfort which is begotten of a love of the animal. For him the horse was essentially a means of transport, and all other animals were looked at in a like utilitarian spirit.

In every village he found a friend. As often as not he was the first to bring the news of war to a people who have scarcely known peace these hundred years. The teller of news cannot help telling with his tidings his own view of them; and Evasio Mon made it known that in his opinion all who had a grievance could want no better opportunity of airing it.

Thus he traveled slowly through the country towards Montserrat; and wherever his slight, black-clad form and serene face had passed, the spirit of unrest was left behind. In remote Aragonese villages, as in busy Catalan towns where the artisan (that disturber of ancient peace) was already beginning to add his voice to things of Spain, Evasio Mon always found a hearing.

Needless to say he found in every village Venta, in every Posada of the towns, that which is easy to find in this babbling world—a talker.

And Evasio Mon was a notable listener.

CHAPTER VI

PILGRIMS

It is not often that nature takes the trouble to stir the heart of man into any emotion stronger than a quiet admiration or a peaceful wonder. Here and there on the face of the earth, however, the astonishing work of God gives pause to the most casual observer, the most thoughtless traveler.

"Why did He do this?" one wonders. And no geologist—not even a French geologist with his quick imagination and lively sense of the picturesque—can answer the question.

On first perceiving the sudden, uncouth height of Montserrat the traveler must assuredly ask in his own mind, "Why?"

The mountain is of granite, where no other granite is. It belongs to no neighbouring formation. It stands alone, throwing up its rugged peaks into a cloudless sky. It is a piece from nothing near it—from nothing nearer, one must conclude, than the moon. No wonder it stirred the imagination of mediæval men dimly groping for their God.

Ignatius de Loyola solved the question with that unbounded assurance which almost always accompanies the greatest of human blunders. It is the self-confident man who compasses the finest wreck.

Loyola, wounded in the defense of that strongest little city in Europe, Pampeluna—wounded, alas! and not killed—jumped to the conclusion that God had reared up Montserrat as a sign. For it was here that the Spanish soldier, who was to mould the history of half the world, dedicated himself to Heaven.

Within sight of the Mediterranean and of the Pyrenees, towering above the brown plains of Catalonia, this shrine is the greatest in Christendom that bases its greatness on nothing but tradition. Thousands of pilgrims flock here every year. Should they ask for history, they are given a legend. Do they demand a fact, they are told a miracle. On payment of a sufficient fee they are shown a small, ill-carved figure in wood. The monastery is not without its story; for the French occupied it and burnt it to the ground. For the rest, its story is that of Spain, torn hither and thither in the hopeless struggle of a Church no longer able to meet the demands of an enlightened religious comprehension, and endeavouring to hold back the inevitable advance of the human understanding.

To-day a few monks are permitted to live in the great houses teaching music and providing for the wants of the devout pilgrims. Without the monastery gate, there is a good and exceedingly prosperous restaurant where the traveler may feed. In the vast houses, is accommodation for rich and poor; a cell and clean linen, a bed and a monastic basin. The monks keep a small store, where candles may be bought and matches, and even soap, which is in small demand.

Evasio Mon arrived at Montserrat in the evening,

having driven in open carriage from the small town of Monistrol in the valley below. It was the hour of the table d'hôte, and the still evening air was ambient with culinary odours. Mon went at once to the office of the monastery, and there received his sheets and pillow-case, his towel, his candle, and the key of his cell in the long corridor of the house of Santa Maria de Jesu. He knew his way about these holy houses, and exchanged a nod of recognition with the lay brother on duty in the office.

Then this traveler hurried across the courtyard and out of the great gate to join the pilgrims of the richer sort at table in the dining-room of the restaurant. There were four who looked up from their plates and bowed in the grave Spanish way when he entered the room. Then all fell to their fish again in silence; for Spain is a silent country, and only babbles in that home of fervid eloquence and fatal verbosity, the Cortes. It is always dangerous to enter into conversation with a stranger in Spain, for there is practically no subject upon which the various nationalities are unable to quarrel. A Frenchman is a Frenchman all the world over, and politics may be avoided by a graceful reference to the *Patrie*, for which Republican and Legitimist are alike prepared to die. But the Spaniard may be an Aragonese or a Valencian, an Andalusian or a Guipuzcoan, and patriotism is a flower of purely local growth and colour.

Thus men, meeting in public places have learnt to do so in silence; and a table d'hôte is a wordless function unless the inevitable Andalusian—he who takes the place of the Gascon in France—is present with his babble and

his laugh, his fine opinion of himself, and his faculty for making a sacrifice of his own dignity at that over-rated altar—the shrine of sociability.

There was no Andalusian at this small table to serve at once as a link of sympathy between the quiet men, who would fain silence him, and a means of making unsociable persons acquainted with each other. The five men were thus permitted to dine in a silence befitting their surroundings and their station in life. For they were obviously gentlemen, and obviously of a thoughtful and perhaps devout habit of mind. A keen observer who has had the cosmopolitan education, say, of an attaché, is usually able to assign a nationality to each member of a mixed assembly; but there was a subtle resemblance to each other in these diners, which would have made the task a hard one. These were citizens of the world, and their likeness lay deeper than a mere accident of dress. In fact, the most remarkable thing about them was that they were all alike studiously unremarkable.

After the formal bow, Evasio Mon gave his attention to the fare set before him. Once he raised his narrow gaze, and, with a smile of recognition, acknowledged the grave and very curt nod of a man seated opposite. A second time he met the glance of another diner, a stout, puffy man, who breathed heavily while he ate. Both men alike averted their eyes at once, and both looked towards a little wizened man, doubled up in his chair, who ate sparingly, and bore on his wrinkled face and bent form, the evidence of such a weight of care as few but kings and ministers ever know.

So absorbed was he that after one glance at Evasio Mon he lapsed again into his own thoughts. The very manner in which he crumbled his bread and handled his knife and fork showed that his mind was as busy as a mill. He was oblivious to his surroundings; had forgotten his companions. His mind had more to occupy it than one brief lifetime could hope to compass. Yet he was so clearly a man in authority that a casual observer could scarcely have failed to perceive that these devout pilgrims, from Italy, from France, from far-off Poland, and Saragossa close at hand in Catalonia, had come to meet him and were subordinate to him.

It was probably no small task to command such men as Evasio Mon—and the other four seemed no less pliable behind their gentle smile.

When the dessert had been placed on the table and one or two had reflectively eaten a baked almond, more from habit than desire, the little wizened man looked round the table with the manner of a rather absent-minded host.

"It is eight o'clock," he said in French. "The monastery gate closes at half-past. We have no time to discuss our business at this table. Shall we go within the monastery gates? There is a seat by the wall, near the fountain, in the courtyard ——"

He rose as he spoke, and it became at once apparent that this was a great man. For all stood aside as he passed out, and one opened the door as to a prince; of which amenities he took no heed.

The monastery is built against the sheer side of the mountain, perched on a cornice, like a huge eagle's nest.

The buildings have no pretense to architectural beauty, and consist of barrack-like houses built around a quadrangle. The chapel is at the farther end, and is, of course, the centre of interest. Here is kept the sacred image, which has survived so many chances and changes; which, hidden for a hundred and fifty years in a cavern on the mountainside, made itself known at last by a miraculous illumination at night, and for the further guidance of the faithful gave forth a sweet scent. It, moreover, selected this spot for its shrine by jibbing under the immediate eye of a bishop, and refusing to be carried further up the mountain.

The house of Santa Maria de Jesu has the advantage of being at the outer end of the quadrangle, and thus having no house opposite to it, faces a sheer fall of three thousand feet. A fountain splashes in the courtyard below, and a low wall forms a long seat where the devout pass the evening hours in that curt and epigrammatic conversation, which is more peaceful than the quick talk of Frenchmen, and deeper than the babble of Italy.

It was to this wall that the little wizened man led the way, and here seated himself with a gesture, inviting his companions to do the same. Had any idle observer been interested in their movements he would have concluded that these were four travelers, probably pilgrims of the better class, who had made acquaintance at the table d'hôte.

"I have come a long way," said the little man at once, speaking in the rather rounded French of the Italian born, "and have left Rome at a time when the Church requires the help of even the humblest of her

servants—I hope our good Mon has something important and really effective this time to communicate."

Mon smiled at the implied reproach.

"And I, too, have come from far—from Warsaw," said the stout man, breathing hard, as if to illustrate the length of his journey. "Let us hope that there is something tangible this time."

He spoke with the gaiety and lightness of a Frenchman; for this was that Frenchman of the North, a Pole.

Mon lighted a cigarette, with a gay jerk of the match towards the last speaker, indicative of his recognition of a jest.

"Something," continued the Pole, "more than great promises—something more stable than a castle—in Spain. Ha, ha! You have not taken Pampeluna yet, my friend. One does not hear that Bilboa has fallen into the hands of the Carlists. Every time we meet you ask for money. You must arrange to give us something—for our money, my friend."

"I will arrange," answered Mon in his quiet, neat enunciation, "to give you a kingdom."

And he inclined his head forward to look at the Pole through the upper half of his gold-rimmed glasses.

"And not a vague republic in the region of the North Pole," said the stout man with a laugh. "Well, who lives shall see."

"You want more money—is that it?" inquired the little wizened man, who seemed to be the leader though he spoke the least—a not unusual characteristic.

"Yes," replied the Spaniard.

"Your country has cost us much this year," said the

little man, blinking his colourless eyes and staring at the ground as if making a mental calculation. "You have forced Germany and France into war. You have made France withdraw her troops from Rome, and you gave Victor Emmanuel the chance he awaited. You have given all Europe—the nerves."

"And now is the moment to play on those nerves," said Mon.

"With your clumsy Don Carlos?"

"It is not the man—it is the Cause. Remember that we are an ignorant nation. It is the ignorant and the half educated who sacrifice all for a cause."

"It is a pity you cannot buy a new Don Carlos with our money," put in the Pole.

"This one will serve," was the reply. "One must look to the future. Many have been ruined by success, because it took them by surprise. In case we succeed, this one will serve. The Church does not want its kings to be capable—remember that."

"But what does Spain want?" inquired the leader.

"Spain doesn't know."

"And this Prince of ours, whom you have asked to be your king. Is not that a spoke in your wheel?" asked the man of few words.

"A loose spoke which will drop out. No one—not even Prim—thinks that he will last ten years. He may not last ten months."

"But you have to reckon with the man. This son of Victor Emmanuel is clever and capable. One can never tell what may arise in a brain that works beneath a crown."

"We have reckoned with him. He is honest. That tells his tale. No honest king can hope to reign over this country in their new Constitution. It needs a Bourbon or a woman."

The quick, colourless eyes rested on Mon's face for a moment, and—who knows?—perhaps they picked up Mon's secret in passing.

"Something dishonest, in a word," put in the Pole.

But nobody heeded him; for the word was with the leader.

"When last we met," he said at length, "and you received a large sum of money, you made a distinct promise; unless my memory deceives me."

He paused, and no one suggested that his memory had ever made slip or lapse in all his long career.

"You said you would not ask for money again unless you could show something tangible—a fortress taken and held, a great General bought, a Province won. Is that so?"

"Yes," answered Mon.

"Or else," continued the speaker, "in order to meet the very just complaint from other countries, such as Poland for instance, that Spain has had more than her share of the common funds—you would lay before us some proposal of self-help, some proof that Spain in asking for help is prepared to help herself by a sacrifice of some sort."

"I said that I would not ask for any sum that I could not double," said Mon.

The little man sat blinking for some minutes silent in that absolute stillness which is peculiar to great heights

"ALL TURNED AND LOOKED AT HIM IN WONDER."

—and is so marked at Montserrat that many cannot sleep there.

"I will give you any sum that you can double," he said, at length.

"Then I will ask you for three million pesetas."

All turned and looked at him in wonder. The fat man gave a gasp. With three million pesetas he could have made a Polish republic. Mon only smiled.

"For every million pesetas that you show me," said the little man, "I will hand you another million—cash for cash. When shall we begin?"

"You must give me time," answered Mon, reflectively. "Say six months hence."

The little man rose in response to the chapel bell, which was slowly tolling for the last service of the day.

"Come," he said, "let us say a prayer before we go to bed."

CHAPTER VII

THE ALTERNATIVE

THE letter written by the Count de Sarrion to his son was delivered to Marcos, literally from hand to hand, by the messenger to whose care it was entrusted.

So fully did the mountaineer carry out his instructions, that after standing on the river bank for some minutes, he deliberately walked knee-deep into the water and touched Marcos on the elbow. For the river is a loud one, and Marcos, intent on his sport, never turned his head to look about him.

This, the last of the Sarrions, was a patient looking man, with the quiet eyes of one who deals with Nature, and the slow movements of the far-sighted. For Nature is always consistent, and never hurries those who watch her closely to obey the laws she writes so large in the instincts of man and beast.

The messenger gave his master the letter and then stood with the water rustling past his woollen stockings. There was an odd suggestion of brotherhood between these men of very different birth. For as men are equal in the sight of God, so are those dimly like each other who live in the open air and cast their lives upon the broad bosom of Nature.

Marcos handed his rod to the messenger, whose face,

wrinkled like a walnut by the sun of Aragon, lighted up suddenly with pleasure.

"There," he said, pointing to a swirling pool beneath some alders. "There is a big one there, I have risen him once."

Hé waded slowly back to the bank where a second crop of hay was already showing its new green, and sat down.

It seemed that Marcos de Sarrion was behind the times—these new and wordy times into which Spain has floundered so disastrously since Charles III was king—for he gave a deeper attention to the matter in hand than most have time for. He turned from the hard task of catching a trout in clear water beneath a sunny sky, and gave his attention to his father's letter.

"After all," it read, "I want you, and await you in Saragossa."

And that was all. "Marcos will come," the Count had reflected, "without persuasion. And explanations are dangerous."

In which he was right. For this river, known as the Wolf, in which Marcos was peacefully fishing, was one of those Northern tributaries of the Ebro which have run with blood any time this hundred years. The country, moreover, that it drained was marked in the Government maps as a blank country, or one that paid no taxes, and knew not the uniform of the Government troops.

Torre Garda, the long two-storied house crowning a hill-top farther up the valley of the Wolf, was one of the few country houses that have not stood empty since

the forties. And all the valley of the Wolf, from the grim Pyrenees standing sentinel at its head to the sunny plain almost in sight of Pampeluna, where the Wolf merges into other streams, was held quiescent in the grip of the Sarrions.

"We will fight," said the men of this valley, "for the king, when we have a king worth fighting for. And we will always fight for ourselves."

And it was said that they only repeated what the Sarrions had told them. At all events, no Carlists came that way.

"Torre Garda is not worth holding," they said.

"And you cannot hold Pampeluna unless you take Torre Garda first," thought those who knew the art of guerilla warfare.

So the valley of the Wolf awaited a king worth fighting for, and in the meantime they paid no taxes, enjoyed no postal service, and were perhaps none the worse without it.

There were Carlists over the mountains on either side of the valley. Eternal snow closed the northern end of it and fed the Wolf in the summer heats. Down at the mouth of the valley where the road was wide enough for two carts to pass each other, and a carriage could be driven at the trot, there often passed a patrol from the Royalist stronghold of Pampeluna. But the Government troops never ventured up the valley which was like a mouse-hole with a Carlist cat waiting round the corner to cut them off. Neither did the Carlists hazard themselves through the narrow defile where the Wolf rushed down its straightened gate; for there were forty thousand men in Pampeluna, only ten miles away.

Which reasons were sound enough to dictate caution in any written word that might pass from the Count in Saragossa to his son at Torre Garda.

A white dog with one yellow and black ear—a dog that might have been a nightmare, a bad, distorted dream of a pointer—stood in front of Marcos de Sarrion as he read the letter and seemed to await the hearing of its contents.

There are many persons of doubtful social standing, who seek to make up—to bridge that narrow and unfathomable gulf—by affability. This dog it seemed, knowing that he was not quite a pointer, sought to conciliate humanity by an eagerness, by a pathetic and blundering haste to try and understand what was expected of him and to perform the same without delay, which was quite foreign to the nature of the real breed.

In Spain one addresses a man by the plain term: Man. And after all, it is something—*déja quelque chose*—to be worthy of that name. This dog was called Perro, which being translated is Dog. He had been a waif in his early days, some stray from the mountains near the frontier, where dogs are trained to smuggle. Full of zeal, he had probably smuggled too eagerly. Marcos had found him, half starved, far up the valley of the Wolf. He had not been deemed worthy of a baptismal name and had been called the Dog—and admitted as such to the outbuildings of Torre Garda. From thence he had worked his humble way upwards. By patience and comfort his mind slowly expanded until men almost forgot that this was a disgraceful mongrel.

Perro had risen from a slumberous contemplation of

the tumbling water and now stood awaiting orders, his near hind leg shaking with eagerness to please, by running anywhere at any pace.

Marcos never spoke to his dog. He had seen Spain humbled to the dust by babble, and the sight had, perhaps, dried up the spring of his speech. For he rarely spoke idly. If he had anything to say, he said it. But if he had nothing, he was silent. Which is, of course, fatal to social advancement, and set him at one stroke outside the pale of political life. Spain at this time, and, indeed, during the last thirty years, had been the happy hunting ground of the *beau sabreur*, of those (of all men, most miserable) who owe their success in life to a woman's favour.

This silent Spaniard might, perhaps, have made for himself a name in the world's arena in other days; for he had a spark of that genius which creates a leader. But fate had ruled that he should have no wider sphere than an obscure Pyrenean gorge, no greater a following than the men of the Valley of the Wolf. These he held in an iron grip. Within his deep and narrow head lay the secret which neither Madrid nor Bayonne could ever understand; why the Valley of the Wolf was neither Royalist nor Carlist. The quiet, slow eyes had alone seen into the hearts of the wild Navarrese mountaineers and knew the way to rule them.

It may be thought that their small number made the task an easy one. But it must also be remembered that these mountain slopes have given to the world the finest guerilla soldiers that history has known, and are peopled by one of the untamed races of mankind.

Moreover, Marcos de Sarrion was a restful man. And those few who see below the surface, know that the restful man is he whose life's task is well within the compass of his ability.

Perro, it seemed, with an intelligence developed at the best and hardest of all schools, where hunger is the usher, awaited, not word, but action from his master; and had not long to wait.

For Marcos rose and slowly climbed the hill towards Torre Garda, half hidden amid the pine trees on the mountain crest above him. There was a midnight train, he knew, from Pampeluna to Saragossa. The railway station was only twenty miles away, which is to this day considered quite a convenient distance in Navarre. There would be a moon soon after nightfall. There was plenty of time. That far-off ancestress of the middle-ages had, it would appear, handed down to her sons forever, with the clear cut profile, the philosophy which allows itself time to get through life unruffled.

The Count de Sarrion was taking his early coffee the next morning at the open window in Saragossa when Marcos, with the dust of travel across the Alkali desert still upon him, came into the room.

"I expected you," said the father. "You will like a bath. All is ready in your room. I have seen to it myself. When you are ready come back here and take your coffee."

His attitude was almost that of a host. For Marcos rarely came to Saragossa. Although there was a striking resemblance of feature between the Sarrions, the father was taller, slighter and quicker in his glance, while

Marcos' face seemed to bespeak a greater strength. In any common purpose it would assuredly fall to Marcos' lot to execute that which his father had conceived. The older man's presence suggested the Court, while Marcos was clearly intended for the Camp.

The Count de Sarrion had passed through both and had emerged half cynical, half indifferent from the slough of an evil woman's downfall.

"You would have made a good soldier," he said to Marcos, when his son at last came home to Torre Garda with an education completed in England and France. "But there is no opening for an honest man in the Spanish Army. Honesty is in the gutter in Spain to-day."

And Marcos always followed his father's advice. Later he found that Spain indeed offered no career to honest men at this time. Gradually he supplanted his father in an unrecognised, indefinable monarchy in the Valley of the Wolf; and there, in the valley, they waited; as good Spaniards have waited these hundred years until such time as God's wrath shall be overpast.

"I have a long story to tell you," said the Count, when his son returned and sat down at once with a keen appetite to his first breakfast of coffee and bread. "And I will tell it without comment, without prejudice, if I can."

Marcos nodded. The Count had lighted a cigarette and now leant against the window which opened on to the heavily barred balcony overlooking the Calle San Gregorio.

"Four nights ago," he said, "at about midnight, Francisco de Mogente returned secretly to Saragossa. I

think he was coming to this house; but we shall never know that. No one knew he was coming—not even Juanita."

The Count glanced at his son only long enough to note the passage of a sort of shadow across his dark eyes at the mention of the schoolgirl's name.

"Francisco was attacked in the street down there, at the corner of the Calle San Gregorio, and was killed," he concluded.

Marcos rose and crossed the room towards the window. He was, it appeared, an eminently practical man, and desired to see the exact spot where Mogente had fallen before the story went any farther. Perro went so far as to push his plebeian head through the bars and look down into the street. It was his misfortune to fall into the fault of excess as it is the misfortune of most parvenus.

"Does Juanita know?" asked Marcos.

"Yes. My sister Dolores has told her. Poor child! It is more in the nature of a disappointment than a sorrow. Her heart is young; and disappointment is the sorrow of the young."

Marcos sat down again in silence.

"We must remember," said the Count, "that she never knew him. It will pass. I saw the incident from this window. There is no door at this side of the house. I should, as you know, have had to go round by the Paseo del Ebro. To render help was out of the question. I went down afterwards, however, when help had come and the dying man had been carried away—by a friar, Marcos! I had seen something fall from the hand

of the murdered man. I went down into the street and picked it up. It was the sword-stick which Juanita sent to her father for the New Year."

"Why did he not let us know that he was coming to Europe?" asked Marcos.

"Ah! That he will tell us hereafter. The mere fact of his being attacked in the streets of Saragossa and killed for the money that was in his pockets is, of course, quite simple, and common enough. But why should he be cared for by a friar, and taken to one of those numerous religious houses which have sprung into unseen existence all over Spain since the Jesuits were expelled?"

"Has he left a will?" asked Marcos.

Sarrion turned and looked at him with a short laugh. He threw his cigarette away, and coming into the room, sat down in front of the small table where Marcos was still satisfying his honest and simple appetite.

"I have told my story badly," he said, with a curt laugh, "and spoilt it. You have soon seen through it. Mogente made a will on his death-bed—which was, by the way, witnessed by Leon de Mogente as a supernumerary, not a legal witness—just to show that all was square and above board."

"Then he left his money——?"

"To Juanita. One can only conclude that he was wandering in mind when he did it. For he was fond of her, I think. He had no reason to wish her harm. I have picked up what unconsidered trifles of information I can, but they do not amount to much. I cabled to Cuba for news as to Mogente's fortune; for we know that he has made one. There is the reply."

He handed Marcos a telegram which bore the words:

"Three million pesetas in the English Funds."

"That is the millstone that he has tied round Juanita's neck," said Sarrion, folding the paper and returning it to his pocket.

"To saddle with three million pesetas a girl who is at a convent school, in the hands of the Sisters of the True Faith, when the Carlist cause is dying for want of funds, and the Jesuits know that it is Don Carlos or a Republic, and all the world knows that all republics have been fatal to the Society—bah!" the Count threw out his hands in a gesture of despair. "It is to throw her into a convent, bound hand and foot. We cannot leave that poor girl without help, Marcos."

"No," said Marcos, gently.

"There is only one way—I have thought of it night and day. There is only one way, my friend."

Marcos looked at his father thoughtfully, and waited to hear what that way might be.

"You must marry her," said the Count.

CHAPTER VIII

THE TRAIL

THE Count rose again and went to the window without looking at Marcos. They had lived together like brothers, and like brothers, they had fallen into the habit of closing the door of silence upon certain subjects.

Juanita, it would appear, was one of these. For neither was at ease while speaking of her. Spaniards and Germans and Englishmen are not notable for a pretty and fanciful treatment of the subject of love. But they approach it with a certain shy delicacy of which the lighter Latin heart has no conception.

The Count glanced over his shoulder, and Marcos, without looking up, must have seen the action, for he took the opportunity of shaking his head.

"You shake your head," said Sarrion, with a sort of effort to be gay and careless, "What do you want? She is the prettiest girl in Aragon."

"It is not that," said Marcos, curtly, with a flush on his brown face.

"Then what is it?"

Marcos made no answer. The Count lighted another cigarette, to gain time, perhaps.

"Listen to me," he said at length. "We have always understood each other, except about Juanita.

We have nearly always been of the same mind—you and I."

Marcos was leaning his arms on the table and looked across the room towards his father with a slow smile.

"Let us try and understand each other about Juanita before we go any farther. You think that there may be thoughts in your mind which are beyond my comprehension. It may not be as bad as that. I allow you, that as the heart grows older it loses a certain sensitiveness and delicacy of feeling. Still the comprehension of such feelings in younger persons may survive. You think that Juanita should be allowed to make her own choice —is it not so—learnt in England, eh?"

"Yes," was the answer.

"And I reply to that; a convent education—the only education open to Spanish girls—does not fit her to make her own choice."

"It is not a question of education.

"No, it is a question of opportunity," said Sarrion sharply. "And a convent schoolgirl has no opportunity. My friend, a father or a mother, if they are wise, will choose better than a girl thrown suddenly into the world from the convent gates. But that is not the question. Juanita will never get outside the convent gates unless we drag her from them—half against her own will."

"We can give her the choice. We have certain rights."

"No rights," replied Sarrion, "that the Church will recognise, and the Church holds her now within its grip."

"She is only a child. She does not know what life means."

"Exactly so," Sarrion exclaimed, "and that makes their plan all the easier of execution. They can bring pressure to bear upon her assiduously and quite kindly so that she will be brought to see that her only chance of happiness is the veil. Few men, and no women at all, can be happy in a life of their own choosing if they are assured by persons in daily intercourse with them—persons whom they respect and love—that in living that life they will assuredly be laying up for themselves an eternity of damnation. We must try and look at it from Juanita's point of view."

Marcos turned and glanced at his father with a smile.

"That is not so easy," he said. "That is what I have been trying to do."

"But you must not overdo it," replied Sarrion, significantly. "Remember that her point of view may be an ignorant one and must be biassed by the strongest and most dangerous influence. Look at the question also from the point of view of a man of the world—and tell me . . . tell me after thinking it over carefully—whether you think that you would feel happy in the future, knowing that you had allowed Juanita to choose a convent life with her eyes blinded."

"I was not thinking of my happiness," said Marcos, quite simply and curtly.

"Of Juanita's happiness?" . . . suggested the Count.

"Yes."

"Then think again and tell me whether you, as a man of the world, can for a moment imagine that Juanita's chance of happiness would de greater in the

convent—whether the Church could make her happier than you could if you give her the opportunity of leading the life that God created her for."

Marcos made no answer. And oddly enough Sarrion seemed to expect none.

"That is . . . ," he explained in the same careless voice, "if we may go on the presumption that you are content to place Juanita's happiness before your own."

"I am content to do that."

"Always?" asked Sarrion, gravely.

"Always."

There was a short silence. Then the Count came into the room, and as he passed Marcos he laid his hand for a moment on his son's broad back.

"Then, my friend," he said, crossing the room and taking up his gloves, "let us get to action. That will please you better than words, I know. Let us go and see Leon—the weakest link in their fine chain. Juanita has no one in the world but us—but I think we shall be enough."

Leon de Mogente lived in an apartment in the Plaza del Pilar. His father, for whom he had but little affection, had made him a liberal allowance which had been spent, so to speak, on his Soul. It elevated the Spirit of this excellent young man to decorate his rooms in imitation of a sanctuary.

He lived in an atmosphere of æsthetic emotion which he quite mistook for holiness. He was a dandy in the care of his Soul, and tricked himself out to catch the eye of High Heaven.

The Marquis de Mogente was out. He had crossed the Plaza, the servant thought to say a prayer in the Cathedral. On the suggestion of the servant, the Sarrions decided to wait until Leon's return. The man, who had the air of a murderer (or a Spanish Cathedral chorister), volunteered to go and seek his master.

"I can say a prayer myself," he said humbly.

"And here is something to put in the poor-box," answered Sarrion with his twisted smile.

"By my soul," he exclaimed, when they were left alone, "this place reeks of hypocrisy."

He looked round the walls with a raised eyebrow.

"I have been trying to discover," he went on, "what was in the mind of Francisco as he lay dying in that house in the Calle San Gregorio—what he was trying to carry out—why he made that will. He sent for Leon, you see, and must have seen at a glance that he had for a son—a mule, of the worst sort. He probably saw that to leave money to Leon was to give it to the Church, which meant that it would be spent for the further undoing of Spain and the propagation of ignorance and superstition."

For Ramon de Sarrion was one of those good Spaniards and good Catholics who lay the entire blame for the downfall of their country from its great estate to a Church, which can only hope to live in its present form as long as superstition and crass ignorance prevail.

"I cannot help thinking," he went on, "that Francisco dimly perceived that he was the victim of a careful plot—one sees something like that in all these ramifications. Three million pesetas are worth scheming for.

They would make a difference in any cause. They might make all the difference at this moment in Spain. Kingdoms have been won and lost for less than three million pesetas. I believe he was watched in Cuba, and his return was known. Or perhaps he was brought back by some clever forgery. Who knows? At all events, it was known that he had left his money nearly all to Leon."

"We will ask Leon," suggested Marcos, "what reason his father gave for making a new will."

"And he will lie to you," said Sarrion.

"But he will lie badly," murmured Marcos, with his leisurely reflective smile.

"I think," said Sarrion, after a pause, "nay, I feel sure that Francisco left his fortune to Juanita at the last moment, as a forlorn hope—leaving it to you and me to get her out of the hobble in which he placed her. You know it was always his hope that you and Juanita should marry."

But Marcos' face hardened, and he had nothing to say to this reiteration of the dead man's hope. The silence was not again broken before Leon de Mogente came in.

He looked from one to the other with an apprehensive glance. His pale eyes had that dulness which betokens, if not an absorption in the things to come, that which often passes for the same, an incompetence to face the present moment.

"I was about to write to you," he said, addressing himself to Sarrion. "I am having a mass celebrated to-morrow in the Cathedral. My father, I know . . ."

"I shall be there," said Sarrion, rather shortly.

"And Marcos?"

"I, also," replied Marcos.

"One must do what one can," said Leon, with a resigned sigh.

Marcos, the man of action and not of words, looked at him and said nothing. He was perhaps noticing that the dishonest boy had grown into a dishonest man. Monastic religion is like a varnish, it only serves to bring out the true colour, and is powerless to alter it by more than a shade. Those who have lived in religious communities know that human nature is the same there as in the world—that a man who is not straightforward may grow in monastic zeal day by day, but he will never grow straightforward. On the other hand, if a man be a good man, religion will make him better, but it must not be a religion that runs to words.

Leon sat with folded hands and lowered eyes. He was a sort of amateur monk, and, like all amateurs, he was apt to exaggerate outward signs. It was Marcos who spoke at length.

"Do you intend," he asked in his matter-of-fact way, "to make any effort to discover and punish your father's assassins?"

"I have been advised not to."

"By whom?"

Leon looked distressed. He was pained, it would seem, that the friend of his childhood should step so bluntly on to delicate ground.

"It is a secret of the confession."

Marcos exchanged a grave glance with his father, who sat back in his chair as one may see a leader sit back

"'DO YOU INTEND TO PUNISH YOUR FATHER'S ASSASSINS?'"

while his junior counsel conducts an able cross-examination.

"Have you advised Juanita of the terms of her father's will?"

"I understand," answered Leon, "that it will make but little difference to Juanita. She has her allowance as I have mine. My father, I understand, had but little to bequeath to her."

Marcos glanced at his father again, and then at the clock. He had, it appeared, finished his cross-examination, and was now characteristically anxious to get to action.

Sarrion now took the lead in conversation, and proffered the usual condolences and desire to help, in the formal Spanish way. He could hardly conceal his contempt for Leon, who, for his part, was not free from embarrassment. They had nothing in common but the subject which had brought the Sarrions hither, and upon this point they could not progress satisfactorily, seeing that Sarrion himself had evidently sustained a greater loss than the dead man's own son.

They rose and took leave, promising to attend the mass next day. Leon became interested again at once in this side of the question, which was not without a thrill of novelty for him. He had organised and taken part in many interesting and gorgeous ceremonies. But a requiem mass for one's own father must necessarily be unique in the most varied career of religious emotion. He was a little flurried, as a girl is flurried at her first ball, and felt that the eye of the black-letter saints was upon him.

He shook hands absent-mindedly with his friends, and was already making mental note of their addition to the number secured for to-morrow's ceremony. He was very earnest about it, and Marcos left him with a sudden softening of the heart towards him, such as the strong must always feel for the weak.

"You see," said Sarrion, when they were in the street, "what Evasio Mon has made him. I do not know whether you are disposed to hand over Juanita and her three million pesetas to Evasio Mon as well."

Marcos made no reply, but walked on, wrapt in thought.

"I must see Juanita," he said, at length, after a long silence, and Sarrion's wise eyes were softened by a smile which flitted across them like a flash of sunlight across a darkened field.

"Remember," he said, "that Juanita is a child. She cannot be expected to know her own mind for at least three years."

Marcos nodded his head, as if he knew what was coming.

"And remember that the danger is imminent—that Evasio Mon is not the man to let the grass grow beneath his feet—that we cannot let Juanita wait . . . three weeks."

"I know," answered Marcos.

CHAPTER IX

THE QUARRY

SARRION called at the convent school of the Sisters of the True Faith the next morning, and was informed through the grating that the school was in Retreat.

"Even I, whose duty it is to speak to you, shall have to perform penance for doing so," said the doorkeeper, in her soft voice through the bars.

"Then do an extra penance, my sister," returned Sarrion, "and answer another question. Tell me if the Sor Teresa is within?"

"The Sor Teresa is at Pampeluna, and the Mother Superior is here in the school herself. The Sor Teresa is only Sister Superior, you must know, and is therefore subordinate to the Mother Superior."

Sarrion was a pleasant-spoken man, and a man of the world. He knew that if a woman has something to tell of another she is not to be frightened into silence by the whole Court of Cardinals and eke, the Pope of Rome himself. So he drew his horse nearer to the forbidding wooden gate, and did not ride away from it until he had gained some scraps of information and saddled the lay sister with a burden of penances to last all through the Retreat.

He learnt that his sister had been sent to Pampeluna, where the Sisters of the True Faith conducted another

school, much patronised by the poor nobility of that priest-ridden city. He was made to understand, moreover, that Juanita de Mogente had been given special opportunities for prayer and meditation owing to an unchristian spirit of resentment and revenge, which she had displayed on learning the Will of Heaven in regard to her abandoned, and it was to be feared, heretic father.

"Which means, my sister?"

"That neither you nor any other in the world may see or speak to her—but I must close the grille."

And the little shutter was sharply shut in Sarrion's face.

This was the beginning of a quest which, for a fortnight, continued entirely fruitless. Evasio Mon it appeared was on a pilgrimage. Sor Teresa had gone to Pampeluna. The inexorable gate of the convent school remained shut to all comers.

Sarrion went to Pampeluna to see his sister, but came back without having attained his object. Marcos took up the trail with a patient thoroughness learnt at the best school—the school of Nature. He was without haste, and expressed neither hope nor discouragement. But he realised more and more clearly that Juanita was in genuine danger. By one or two moves in this subtle warfare, Sarrion had forced his adversary to unmask his defenses. Some of the obstructions behind which Juanita was now concealed could scarcely have originated in chance.

Marcos had, in the course of his long antagonism against wolf or bear or boar in the Central Pyrenees, more than once experienced that sharp shock of aston-

ishment and fear to which the big-game hunter can scarcely remain indifferent when he finds himself opposed by an unmistakable sign of an intelligence equal to his own or an instinct superior to it, subtly meeting his subtle attack. This he experienced now, and knew that he himself was being watched and his every action forestalled. The effect was to make him the more dogged, the more cunning in his quest. Because he knew that Juanita's cause was in competent hands, or for some other reason, Sarrion withdrew from taking such an active part as heretofore.

His keen and careful eyes noted a change in Marcos. Juanita's helplessness seemed to have aroused a steady determination to help her at any cost. Weakness is an appeal that strength rarely resists.

It was Marcos who finally discovered an opportunity, and with characteristic patience he sifted it, and organised a plan of action before making anything known to his father.

"There is a service in the Cathedral of La Seo tomorrow evening," he announced suddenly at midnight one night on his return from a long and tiring day. "All the girls of the convent schools will be there."

"Ah!" said Sarrion, looking his son up and down with a speculative eye. "Well?"

"My aunt . . . Sor Teresa . . . is likely to be there. She has returned to Saragossa to-day. The Mother Superior—by the grace of God—has indigestion. I have got a letter safely through to Sor Teresa. The service is at seven o'clock. The Archbishop will go in procession round the Cathedral to bless

the people. The Cathedral is very dark. There will be considerable confusion when the doors are opened and the people crowd out. I have a few men—of the road, from the Posada de los Reyes—who will add to the confusion under my instructions. I think if you help me we can get Juanita separated from the rest. I will take her home and see to it that she arrives at the school at the same time as the others. We can arrange it, I think."

"Yes," answered Sarrion. "I have no doubt that we can arrange it."

And they sat far into the night, after the manner of conspirators, discussing Marcos' plans, which were, like himself, quite simple and direct.

The Cathedral of the Seo in Saragossa is one of the most ancient in Spain, and bears in its architecture some resemblance to the Moorish mosque that once stood on the same spot. It is a huge square building, dimly lighted by windows set high up in the stupendous roof. The choir is a square set down in the middle—a church within a Cathedral. There are two principal entrances, one on the Plaza de la Seo, where the fountain is, and where, in the sunshine, the philosophers of Saragossa sit and do nothing from morn till eve. The other entrance is that which is known as the grand portal, and with a wrong-headedness characteristic of the Peninsular, it is situated in a little street where no man passes.

Marcos knew that the grand portal was used by the religious communities and devout persons who came to church for the good motive, while those who praised God that man might see them entered, and quitted the

Cathedral by the more public doorway on the Plaza. He knew also that the convent schools took their station just within the great porch, which, during the day, is the parade ground for those authorised beggars who wear their number and licence suspended round their necks as a guarantee of good faith.

The Cathedral was crammed to suffocation when Marcos and his father entered by this door. At the foot of the shallow steps descending from the porch to the floor of the Cathedral, Sor Teresa's white cap rose above the heads of the people. Here and there a nun's cap or the blue veil of a nursing sister showed itself amidst the black mantillas. Here and there the white head of some old man made its mark among the sunburnt faces. For there were as many men as women present. The majority of them looked about them as at a show, but all were silent and respectful. All made room readily enough for any who wished to kneel. There was no pushing, no impatience. All were polite and forbearing.

The Archbishop's procession had already left the door of the choir, and was moving slowly round the building. It was preceded by a chorister and a boy, who sang in unison with a strange, uncomfortable echo in the roof. Immediately on their heels followed a man in his usual outdoor clothes, who accompanied them on a haut-boy with queer, snorting notes, and nodded to his friends as he perceived their faces dimly looming in the light of the flickering candles carried by acolytes behind him.

They stopped at intervals and sang a verse. Then the organ, far above their heads, rolled in its solemn

notes, and the whole choir broke into song as they moved on.

The Archbishop, preceded by the Host borne aloft beneath a silken canopy, wore a long red silk robe, of which the train was carried by two careless acolytes, a red silk biretta and red gloves.

As the Host passed the people knelt and rose, and knelt again as the Archbishop came—a sort of human tide, rising and kneeling and rising again, to dust their knees and stare about them, which was not without a symbolical meaning for those who know the history of the Church in Latin countries.

The face of the Archbishop struck a sudden and startling note of sincerity as he passed on with upheld hand and eyes turning from side to side with a luminous look of love and tenderness as he silently invoked God's blessing on these his people. He passed on, leaving in some doubting hearts, perhaps, the knowledge that amid much that was mistaken, and tawdry and superstitious and evil, here at all events was one good man.

Immediately behind him, came the beadle in vestments and a long flaxen wig ill-combed, put on all awry, making room with his staff and hitting the people if they would not leave off praying and get out of the way.

Then followed the choir—a living study in evil countenances—perfunctory, careless, snuff-blown and ill-shaven, with cold hard faces like Inquisitors.

All the while the great bell was booming overhead, and the whole atmosphere seemed to vibrate with sound and emotion. It was moving and impressive, especially

for those who think that the Almighty is better pleased with abject abasement than a plain common-sense endeavour to do better, and will accept a long tale of public penance before the record of simple daily duties honestly performed.

Near the great porch on either side of the bishop's path were ranged the seminarists, in cassocks of black with a dark blue or red hood—depressing looking youths with flaccid faces and an unhealthy eye. Behind them stood a group of friars in rough woolen garments of brown, with heads clean shaven all but an inch of closely cut hair like a halo on a saint. They seemed cheerful and were laughing and joking among themselves while the procession passed.

Behind these, on their knees, were the girls of the convent school—and all around them closed in the crowd. Juanita was at one end of the row and Sor Teresa at the other. Juanita was looking about her. Her special opportunities for prayer and reflection had perhaps had the effect that such opportunities may be expected to have, and she was a little weary of all this to-do about the world to come; for she was young and this present world seemed worthy of consideration. She glanced backwards over her shoulder as the Archbishop passed with his following of candles, and gave a little start. Marcos was kneeling on the pavement behind her. Sor Teresa was looking straight in front of her between the wings of her great cap. It was hard to say whether she saw Juanita, or was aware that a man was kneeling immediately behind herself, almost on the hem of her flowing black robes—her own brother, Sarrion.

The procession moved away down the length of the great building and left darkness behind it. Already there was a stir among the people, for it was late and many had come from a distance.

The great doors, rarely used, were slowly cast open and in the darkness the crowd surged forward. Juanita was nearest to the door. She looked round and Sor Teresa made a motion with her head telling her to lead the way. Marcos was at her side. A few men in cloaks, and some in shirt-sleeves, seemed to be grouped by chance around him. He looked back and made a little movement of the head towards his father.

Juanita felt herself pushed from behind. Before her, singularly enough, was a clear pathway between the crowds. Behind her a thousand people pressed forward towards the exit. She hurried out and glancing back on the steps saw that she had become separated from the school and from the nuns by a number of men. But Marcos' hand was already on her arm.

"Come," he said, "I want to speak to you. It is all right. My father is beside Sor Teresa."

"What fun!" she answered in a whisper. "Let us be quick."

And a moment later they were running side by side down a narrow street, where a single lamp swung from a gibbet at the corner and flickered in the wind of Saragossa.

It was Juanita who stopped suddenly.

"Oh, Marcos," she cried, "I forgot; we are not to walk home. There is an omnibus to meet us as usual at these late services."

"It will not come," replied Marcos. "The driver is waiting to tell Sor Teresa that his horses are lame and he cannot come."

"And why have you done this?" asked Juanita, looking at him with bright eyes beneath her mantilla flying in the wind.

"Because I want to speak to you. We can walk home to the school together. It is all arranged. My father is with Sor Teresa."

"What, all the way?" she asked in a delighted voice.

"Yes."

"And can we go through the streets and see the shops?"

"Yes, if you like; if you keep your mantilla close."

"Marcos, you are a dear! But I have no money; you must lend me some."

"Yes, if you like. What do you want to buy?"

"Oh, chocolates," she answered. "Those brown ones, all soft inside. How much money have you?"

And she held out her hand in the dim light of the street lamps.

"I will give you the chocolates," he answered. "As many as you like."

"How kind of you. You *are* a dear. I am so glad to see your solemn old face again. I am very hard up. I don't really know where all my pocket-money has gone to this term."

She laughed gaily, and turned to look up at him. And in a moment her manner changed.

"Oh, Marcos," she said, "I am so miserable. And I have no one to talk to. You know—papa is dead."

"Yes," he answered, "I know."

"For three days," she went on, "I thought I should die. And then, but I am afraid it wasn't prayer, Marcos, I began to feel—better, you know. Was it very wicked? Of course I had never seen him. It would have been quite different if it had been my dear, darling old Uncle Ramon—or even you, Marcos."

"Thank you," said Marcos.

"But I had only his letters, you know, and they were so political! Then I felt most extremely angry with Leon for being such a muff. He did nothing to try and find out who had killed papa, and go and kill him in return. I felt so disgusted that I was not a man. I feel so still, Marcos. This is the shop, and those are the chocolates stuck on that sheet of white paper. Let us buy the whole sheet. I will pay you back next term."

They entered the shop and there Marcos bought her as many chocolates as she could hope to conceal beneath the long ends of her mantilla.

"I will bring you more," he said, "if you will tell me how to get them to you."

She assured him that there was nothing simpler; and made him a participant in a dead secret only known to a few, of the hole in the convent wall, large enough to pass the hand through, down by the frog-pond at the bottom of the garden and near the old door which was never opened.

"If you wait there on Thursday evening between seven and eight I will come, if I can, and will poke my hand through the hole in the wall. But how shall I know that it is you?"

"I will kiss your hand when it comes through," answered Marcos.

"Yes," she said, rather slowly. "What a joke."

But now they were at the gate of the convent school, having come a short way, and they stood beneath the thick trees until the school came, with its usual accompaniment of eager talk like the running of water beneath a low bridge and its babble round the stones.

Juanita slipped in among her schoolmates, and Sor Teresa, looking straight in front of her, saw nothing.

CHAPTER X

THISBE

It was the custom in the convent school on the Torrero-hill to receive visitors on Thursdays. This festivity farther extended to the evening, when the girls were allowed to walk for an hour in the garden and talk. Talking, it must be remembered, as an indulgence of the flesh, is considered in religious communities to be a treat only permitted at certain periods. It is, indeed, only by tying the tongue that tyranny can hope to live.

"These promenades are not without use," the Mother Superior once said to Evasio Mon, one of the lay directors of this school. "One discovers what friendships have been formed."

But the Mother Superior, like many cunning persons, was wrong. For a schoolgirl's friendship is like the seed of grass, blown hither and thither; while only one or two of a sowing take root in some hidden corner and grow.

Juanita's bosom friend of the red hair had recovered her lost position. Her hair was, in fact, golden again. They were walking in the garden at sunset, and waiting for the clock of San Fernando to strike seven. Juanita had told her friend of the chocolates—all soft inside—which were to come through the hole in the wall; and

the golden haired girl had confided in Juanita that she had never loved her as she did at that moment. Which was, perhaps, not unnatural.

The garden of the convent school is large, and spreads far down the slope of the hill. There are many fruit-trees and a few cypress. Where the stream runs there are bunches of waving bamboos, and at the lower end, where the wall is broken, there is a little grove of nut trees, where the nightingales sing.

"It must be seven; come, let us go slowly towards the trees," said Juanita. They both looked round eagerly. There were two nuns in the gardens, gravely walking side by side, casting demure and not unkindly glances from time to time towards their gay charges. Juanita and her friend had, as elder girls, certain privileges, and were allowed to walk apart from the rest. They were heiresses, moreover, which makes a difference even in a convent school that shuts the world out with forbidding gates.

Juanita bade her friend keep watch, and ran quickly among the trees. The wall was old and overgrown with wild roses and honeysuckle. She found the hole, and, hastily turning back her sleeve, thrust her arm through. Her hand came out through the flowers with an inconsequent, childish flourish of the fingers close by the grave face of Marcos. He was essentially a man of his word; and she jerked her hand away from his lips with a gay laugh.

"Marcos," she said, "the packets must be small or they will not come through."

"I have had them made small on purpose," he said.

But she seemed to have forgotten the chocolates already, for her hand did not come back.

"I'm trying to see through," she explained, after a moment. "I can see nothing, only something black. I see. It is your horse; you are on horseback. Is it the Moor? Have you ridden the dear old Moor up here to see me? Please bring his nose near so that I can stroke it."

And her fingers came through the flowers again, feeling the empty air.

"I wonder if he knows my hand," she said. "Oh, Marcos! is there no one to take me away from here? I hate the place; and yet I am afraid. I am afraid of something, Marcos, and I do not know what it is. It was all right when papa was alive. For I felt that he would certainly come some day and take me away, and all this would be over."

"All—what?" inquired Marcos, the matter-of-fact, at the other side of the wall.

"Oh, I don't know. There is a sort of strain and mystery which I cannot define. I am not a coward, you know, but sometimes I am afraid and feel alone in the world. There is Leon, of course; but Leon is no good, is he?"

"No, he is no good," replied Marcos.

"And, Marcos, do you think it is possible to be in the world and yet be saved; to be quite safe, I mean, for the next world, like Sor Teresa?"

"Yes, I do."

"Does Uncle Ramon think so?"

"Yes," replied Marcos.

"MARCOS WAS ESSENTIALLY A MAN OF HIS WORD."

"What a bother one's soul is," she said, with a sigh. "I'm sure mine is. I am never allowed to think of anything else."

"Why?" asked Marcos, who was a patient searcher after remedies, and never discussed matters which could not be ameliorated by immediate action.

"Oh! because it seems that I am more than usually wicked. No one seems to think it possible that I can save my soul unless I go into religion."

"And you do not want to do that?"

"No, I never want to do it. Not even when I have been a long time in Retreat and we have been happy and quiet, here, inside the walls. And the life they lead here seems so little trouble; and one can lay aside that nightmare of the world to come. I do not even want it then. But when I go into the world, like last Sunday, Marcos, and see the shops, and Uncle Ramon and you, then I hate the thought of it. And when I touched the dear old Moor's soft nose just now, I felt I couldn't do it at any cost; but that I must go into the world and have dogs and horses, and see the mountains and enjoy myself, and leave the rest to chance and the kindness of the Virgin, Marcos."

He did not answer at once, and she thrust her hand through the woodbine again.

"Where are you?" she asked. "Why do you not answer?"

He took her hand and held it for a moment.

"You are thinking," she said, with a little laugh. "I know. I have seen you think like that by the side of the river, when one of the trout would not come out of

the Wolf and you were wondering what more you could do to try and make him. What are you thinking about?"

"About you."

"Oh!" she laughed. "You must not take it so seriously as that. Everybody is very kind, you know. And I am quite happy here. At least, I think I am. Where are the chocolates? I believe you have eaten them on the way—you and the Moor. I always said you were the same sort of people, you two, didn't I?"

By way of reply he handed the little neat packets, tied with ribbon.

"Thank you," she said. "You are kind, Marcos. Somehow you never say things, but you do them—which is better, is it not?"

"I will get you out of here," he answered, "if you want it."

"How?" she asked, with a startled ring in her voice. "Can you really do it? Tell me how."

"No," answered Marcos. "I will not tell you how. Not now. But I can do it if you are in real danger of going into religion against your will; if there is real necessity."

"How?" she asked again, with a deeper note in her voice.

"I will not tell you," he answered, "until the necessity arises. It is a secret, and you might have to tell it . . . in confession."

"Yes," she admitted. "Perhaps you are right. But you will come again next Thursday, Marcos?"

"Yes," he answered, "next Thursday."

"By the way, I forgot. I wrote you a note, in case there should have been no time to speak to you. Where is it, in my pocket? No, here, I have it. Do you want it?"

"Yes."

And Marcos tried to get his hand through the hole in the wall, but he failed.

"Aha?" laughed Juanita. "You see I have the advantage of you."

"Yes," he answered gravely. "You have the advantage of me."

And on the other side of the wall, he smiled slowly to himself.

"Go! Go at once," she whispered hurriedly, "Milagros is calling me. There is some one coming. I can see through the leaves. It is Sor Teresa. And she has some one with her. Oh! it is Senor Mon. He is terrible. He sees everything. Go, Marcos!"

And Marcos did not wait. He had the note in his hand—a small screw of paper, all wet with the dew on the woodbine. He galloped up the hill, close under the wall, and put his willing horse straight at the canal. The horse leapt in and struggled, half swimming, across.

To have gone any other way would have been to make himself visible from one part or another of the convent grounds, and Evasio Mon was in that garden.

Both Sor Teresa and Evasio Mon saw Juanita emerge from the nut trees and join her friend, but neither appeared to have noticed anything unusual.

"By the way," said Mon, pleasantly, "I am on foot

and can save myself a considerable distance by using the door at the foot of the garden."

"That way is unfrequented," answered Sor Teresa. "It is scarcely considered desirable at night."

"Oh! no one will touch me—a poor man," said Mon, with his pleasant smile. "Have you the key with you?"

Sor Teresa looked on the bunch hanging at her girdle.

"No," she admitted rather reluctantly, "I will send for it."

And she called by gesture one of the nuns who seemed to be looking the other way and yet perceived the movement of Sor Teresa's hand.

While the key was being brought, Mon stood looking with his gentle smile over the lower wall of the garden, where the pathway cuts across the bare fields down towards the river.

"Would it not be wiser to carry that key with you always in case it should be wanted, as in the present instance?" he said, smoothly.

"I shall do so in future," replied Sor Teresa, humbly; for the first duty of a nun is obedience, and there is no nunnery that is not under the immediate and unquestioned control of some man, be he a priest or in some privileged cases, the Pontiff himself.

At last a second bunch of keys was placed in Sor Teresa's hands, and she examined them carefully.

"I am not quite sure," she said, "which is the right one. It is so seldom used."

And she fingered them, one by one.

Mon glanced at her sharply, though his lips still smiled.

"Allow me," he said. "Those keys among which you are looking are the keys of cupboards and not of doors. There are only two door keys among them all."

He took the keys and led the way towards the door hidden behind the grove of nut-trees. The nightingales were singing as he passed beneath the boughs, followed by Sor Teresa. Juanita hurrying up towards the house by another path, turned and glanced anxiously over her shoulder.

"This, I think, will be the key," said Mon, affably, as he stooped to examine the lock. And he was right.

He opened the door, passed out and turned to salute Sor Teresa before he closed it gently, in her face.

"Go with God, my sister," he said, bowing with a raised hat and ceremonious smile.

He waited until he heard Sor Teresa lock the door from within. Then he turned to examine the ground in the little lane that skirts the convent wall. But on the sun-baked ground, the neat, light feet of the Moor had made no mark. He looked at the wall, but failed to perceive the hole in it, for the woodbine and the wild rose tree covered it like a curtain.

Marcos had made a round by the summit of the hill and turning to the right rejoined the high road from the Casa Blanca, crossing the canal again by that bridge and returning to Saragossa by the broad avenue known as the Monte Torrero.

He reined in his horse beneath the lamp that hangs from the trees opposite to the gate of the town called the Puerta de Santa Engracia, and unfolded the note that

Juanita had written to him. It was scribbled in pencil on a half sheet torn from an exercise book.

"Dear Marcos," it said. "Thank you most preposterously for the chocolates. The next time please put in some almonds. Milagros so loves almonds; and I am very fond of Milagros—Your grateful Juanita."

There was a mistake in the spelling.

CHAPTER XI

THE ROYAL ADVENTURE

THERE are halting-places in the lives of most men when for a period the individual desire must give place to some great national need. We each live our little story through, but at times we find ourselves dragged from the narrow way into the great high road, where the history of the world blunders to an end which cannot even yet be dimly discerned.

When Marcos rode into Saragossa after nightfall he found the streets filled by groups of anxious men. The nerves of civilisation were at a great tension at this time. Sedan was past. Paris was already besieged. All the French-speaking people thought that the end of the world must needs be at hand. The Pope had been deprived of his temporal power. The great foundations of the world seemed to tremble beneath the onward tread of inexorable history.

In Spain itself, no man knew what might happen next. There seemed no depth to which the land of ancient glory might not be doomed to descend. Cuba was in wild revolt. Thousands of lives had been uselessly thrown away. Already the pride of the proudest nation since Rome, had been humbled by the just interference of the United States. A kingdom without a king, Spain had hawked her crown round Europe. For a throne, as

for humbler posts, it is easy enough to find second-rate men who have no special groove, nor any capacity to delve one, but the first-rate men are, one discovers, nearly always occupied elsewhere. They are never waiting for something to turn up.

Spain, with her three crowns in her hand, had called at every Court in Europe. She had thrown two nations into the greatest war of civilised ages. She was still looking for a king, still calling hopelessly to the second-rate royalties. Leopold of Hohenzollern would have accepted had not France arisen to object, only to receive a sound thrashing for her pains. Thus, for the second time in the world's history, Spain was the means of bringing a French empire to the dust.

Ferdinand of Portugal, a cousin to the Queen of England, himself a Coburg, finally declined the honour. And Spain could not wait. There was a certain picturesqueness in Prim, the usual ornamental General through whose hands Spain has passed and repassed during the last century. He was a hard man, and the men of Spain, unlike the French, understand a martinet. But Spain could not wait. She must have a king; for the regency was wearisome. It was weary of itself, like an old man ready to die. There was no money in the public coffers. The Cortes was a house of words. Here eloquence reigned supreme; and eloquence never yet made an empire.

Half a dozen different parties made speeches at each other, but Spain, owing to a blessed immunity from the cheap newspaper, was spared these speeches. She was told that Castelar was the eloquent orator of the age.

She looked at Castelar, who was a fat little man with a big moustache and a small forehead, and she said: "Let us have a king!"

Prim was better. He was a man at all events, and not a word-spinner. He was from Cataluña, where they make hard men with clear heads. And he knew his own mind. And he also said: "Let us have a king."

One cried for Don Carlos, and another for Espartero. Cataluña said there was no living with Andalusia. Aragon wanted her own king and wished Valencia would go hang. Navarre was all for Don Carlos.

And when Marcos de Sarrion rode into Saragossa they were calling in the streets that only a republic was possible now.

He went home to that grim palace between the Cathedral and the Ebro and found his father gone. A brief note told him that Sarrion had gone to Madrid where a meeting of notables had been hastily summoned—and that he, Marcos, must hurry back to Torre Garda—that the Carlists were up for their king.

Marcos returned the same night to Pampeluna, and the next day rode to Torre Garda by the high road that winds up the valley of the Wolf. In his own small kingdom be soon made his iron hand felt. And these people who would pay no taxes to king or regent remained quiet amid the anarchy that reigned all over Spain.

Thus a week passed and rumours of strange doings at Madrid reached the quiet valley. All over the country, bands of malcontents calling themselves Carlists had risen in obedience to the voice of Don Carlos' grandson,

the son of that Don Juan who had renounced a hopeless cause. To meet a soldier with his cap worn right side foremost was for the time unusual in the cities of the north. For the army no longer knew a master; and the Spanish soldier has a naïve and simple way of notifying this condition by wearing the peak of his cap behind.

Marcos heard nothing of his father at Madrid, but surmised that there the talkers still held sway. The postal service of Spain is still almost mediæval. In the principal cities the post-offices are to-day only opened for business during two hours of the twenty-four. In the year of the Franco-Prussian war there was no postal service at all to the disaffected parts of the northern provinces.

At the end of a week, Marcos rose at three o'clock and rode sixty miles before sunset to keep his word with Juanita. He did not trust the railway, which indeed was in constant danger of being cut by Carlist or Royalist, but performed the distance by road where he met many friends from Navarre and one or two from the valley of the Wolf. A thousand reports, a hundred rumours and lies innumerable, were on the roads also, traveling hither and thither over Spain. And Marshall Prim seemed to be the favoured god of the moment.

Marcos was at his post outside the convent school wall at seven o'clock. He heard the clock of San Fernando strike eight. In these Southern latitudes the evenings are not much longer in summer than in winter. It was quite dark by eight o'clock when Marcos rode away. He was not given to a display of emotion. He was an eminently practical man. Juanita would have come if

she could, he reflected. Why could she not keep her appointment?

He rode to the main gate and asked if he could see Sor Teresa—known in the world as Dolores Sarrion—for the monastic life was forbidden by law at this time in Spain, and this was no nunnery; though, as in all such places, certain mediæval follies were carefully fostered.

"Sor Teresa is not here," was the reply through the grating.

"Then where is she?"

But there was no reply to this plain question.

"Has she gone to Pampeluna?"

The little shutter behind the grating was softly closed. And Marcos turned his horse's head with a quiet smile. His face, beneath the shadow of his wide hat, was still and hard. He had ridden sixty miles since morning, but he sat upright in his saddle. This was a man, as Juanita had observed, not to say things, but to do them.

It was not difficult for him to find out during the next few weeks that Juanita had been sent to Pampeluna, whither also Sor Teresa had been commanded to go. Saragossa has a playful way of sacking religious houses, which the older-world city of Navarre would never permit. In Pampeluna the religious habit is still respected, and a friar may carry his shaven head high in the windy streets.

Pampeluna, it was known, might at any moment be in danger of attack, but not of bombardment by the Carlists, who had many friends within the walls. Juanita was as safe perhaps in Pampeluna as anywhere in Northern Spain. So Marcos went back to Torre Garda

and held his valley in a quiet grip. The harvests were gathered in, and starvation during the coming winter was, at all events, avoided.

The first snow came and still Marcos had no news of Juanita. He knew, however, that both she and Sor Teresa were still at Pampeluna in the great yellow house in the Calle de la Dormitaleria, nearly opposite the Cathedral gate, from whence there is constant noiseless traffic of sisters and novices hurrying across, with lowered eyes, to the sanctuary, or back to their duties, with the hush of prayer still upon them.

In November Marcos received a letter from his father, sent by hand all the way from the capital. Prim had re-established order, he wrote. There was hope of a settlement of political differences. A king had been found, and if he accepted the crown all might yet go well with Spain.

A week later came the news that Amedeo of Savoy, the younger son of that brave old Victor Emmanuel, who faced the curse of a pope, had been declared King of Spain.

Amedeo of Savoy, Duke of Aosta, was not a second-rate man. He was brave, honest, and a gentleman—qualities to which the throne of Spain had been stranger while the Bourbons sat there.

Sarrion summoned Marcos to Madrid to meet the new king. The wise men of all parties knew that this was the best solution of the hopeless difficulties into which Spain had been thrust by the Bourbons and the tonguesters. A few honest politicians here and there set aside their own interests in the interest of the country, which action

is worth recording—for its rarity. But the country in general was gloomy and indifferent. Spain is slow to learn, while France is too quick; and her knowledge is always superficial.

"Give us at all events a Spaniard," muttered those who had cried "Down with liberty," when that arch-scoundrel, Fernando the Desired, returned to his own.

"Give us money and we will give you Don Carlos," returned the cassocked canvassers of that monarch in a whisper.

It was evening when Marcos arrived at Madrid, and the station, like all the trains, was crowded. All who could were traveling to Madrid to meet the king—for one reason or another.

Marcos was surprised to see his father on the platform among those waiting for the train from the capitals of the North.

"Come," said Sarrion, "let us go out by the side door; I have the carriage there, the streets are impassable. No one knows where to turn. There is no head in Spain now; they assassinated him last night."

"Whom?" asked Marcos.

"Prim. They shot him in his carriage, like a dog in a kennel—five of them—with guns. One has no pride in being a Spaniard now."

Marcos followed his father through the crowd without replying.

There seemed nothing, indeed, to be said; nothing to be added to the simple observation that it was a humiliation for a man to have to admit in these days that he was a Spaniard.

"He was a Catalonian to the last," said Sarrion, when they were seated in their carriage. "He walked dying up his own stairs, so that his wife might be spared the sight of seeing him carried in. Stubborn and brave! One of the best men we have seen."

"And the king?"

"The king lands at Carthagena to-day—lands with his life in his hand. He carries it in his hand wherever he goes, day and night, in Spain, he and his wife. Without Prim he cannot hope to stand. But he will try. We must do what we can."

The carriage was making its careful way across the Puerta del Sol, which had been cleared by grape-shot more than once in Sarrion's recollection. It looked now as if only artillery could set order there.

"Viva el Rey! viva Don Carlos!" a loafer shouted, and waved his hat in Sarrion's grim and smiling face.

"I do not understand," he said to Marcos, as they passed on, "why the good God gives the Bourbons so many chances."

"I cannot understand why the Bourbons never take them," answered Marcos. For he was not a pushing man, but one of those patient waiters on opportunity who appear at length quietly at the top, and look down with thoughtful eyes at those who struggle below. The sweat and strife of some careers must tarnish the brightest lustre.

Father and son drove together to the apartment in a street high above the town, near the church of San José where the Sarrions lived when in Madrid, and there Sarrion gave Marcos further details of that strange

adventure which Amedeo of Spain was about to begin.

In return Marcos vouchsafed a brief account of affairs in the valley of the Wolf. He never had much to say and even in these stirring times told of a fine harvest; of that brilliant weather which marked the year of the Napoleonic downfall.

"And Juanita?" inquired Sarrion at length.

"Is at Pampeluna. They cannot get her away from there without my knowing it. She is well . . . and happy."

"You have not written to her?"

"No," answered Marcos.

"We must remember," said Sarrion, with a nod of approval, "that we are dealing with the cleverest men in the world, and the greediest ——"

"And the hardest pressed," added Marcos.

"But you have not written to her?"

"No."

"Nor heard from her?"

"I had a note from her at Saragossa, before they moved her to Pampeluna," answered Marcos with a smile. "It was rather badly spelt."

"And . . . ?" asked Sarrion.

Marcos did not reply to this comprehensive interrogation.

"You have come to some decision?" Sarrion suggested.

"I have come to the usual decision that you are quite right in your suspicions. They want that money, and they intend to get it by forcing her into religion and in-

ducing her to sign the usual testament made by nuns, conferring all their earthly goods upon the order into which they are admitted."

Then Sarrion went back to his original question.

"And . . . ?"

"As soon as we see signs of their being likely to succeed I propose to see Juanita again."

"You can do it despite them?"

"Yes, I can do it."

"And . . . ?"

"I shall explain the position to her—that her bad fortune has given her choice of two evils."

"That is one way of putting it."

"It is the only honest way."

Sarrion shrugged his shoulders.

"My friend," he said, "I do not think that love and honesty are much in sympathy."

CHAPTER XII

IN A STRONG CITY

AMEDEO, as the world knows, landed at Carthagena to be met by the news that Prim was dead. The man who had summoned him hither to assume the crown, he who alone in all Spain had the power and the will to maintain order in the riven kingdom, had himself been summoned to appear before a higher throne. "There will be no republic in Spain while I live," Prim had often said. And Prim was dead.

"Every dog has his day," a deputy sneeringly observed to the Marshall himself a few hours before he was shot, in response to Prim's plain-spoken intention of striking with a heavy hand all those who should manifest opposition to the Duke of Aosta.

So Amedeo of Spain rode into his capital one snowy day in January, 1871, carrying high his head and looking down with courageous, intelligent eyes upon the faces of the people who refused to cheer him, as upon a sea of hidden rocks through which he must needs steer his hazardous way without a pilot.

Before receiving the living he visited the dead man who may be assumed to have been honest in his intention, as he undoubtedly proved himself to be brave in action; the best man that Spain produced in her time of trouble.

Among the first to bow before the King were the two

Sarrions, and as they returned into an anteroom they came face to face with Evasio Mon, waiting his turn there.

"Ah!" said Sarrion, who did not seem to see the hand that Mon had half extended, "I did not know that you were a courtier."

"I am not," replied Mon; "but I am here to see whether I am too old to learn."

He turned towards Marcos with his pleasant smile, but did not attempt the extended hand here.

"I shall take a lesson from Marcos," he said.

Marcos made no reply, but passed on. And Mon, turning on his heel, looked after him with a sudden misgiving, like one who hears the sound of a distant drum.

"Judging from the persons in his immediate vicinity, our friend has money in his pocket," said Sarrion, as they descended those palace stairs which had streamed with blood a few years earlier.

"Or promises in his mouth. Was that General Pacheco who turned away as we came?"

"Yes," answered Sarrion. "Why do you ask?"

"I have heard that he is to receive a command in the army of the North."

Sarrion made a grimace, uncomplimentary to that very smart soldier General Pacheco, and at the foot of the stairs he stopped to speak to a friend. He spoke in French and named the man by his baptismal name; for this was a Frenchman, named Deulin, a person of mystery, supposed to be in the diplomatic service in some indefinite position. With him was an Englishman, who greeted Marcos as a friend.

"What do you make of all this?" asked Sarrion, addressing himself to the Englishman, who, however, rather cleverly passed the question on to the older man with a slow, British gesture.

"I make of it—that they only want a little money to make Don Carlos king," said Deulin.

"What is Evasio Mon doing in Madrid?" asked Sarrion.

"Raising the money, or spending it," replied the Frenchman, with a shrug of the shoulders, as if it were no business of his.

They passed up-stairs together, but had not gone far when Marcos said the Englishman's name without raising his voice.

"Cartoner."

He turned, and Marcos ran up three steps to meet him.

"Who is the prelate with the face of a fox-terrier?" he asked.

"He represents the Vatican. Is he with Mon?"

Marcos nodded an affirmative, and, turning, descended the stairs.

"I had better get back to Pampeluna," he said to his father.

The train for the Northern frontier leaves Madrid in the evening, and at this time no man knew who might be the next to take a ticket for France. The Sarrions made their preparations to depart the same evening, and, arriving early, secured a compartment to themselves. Marcos, however, did not take his seat, but stood on the platform looking towards the gate through which the passengers must come.

"Are you looking for some one?" asked Sarrion.

"General Pacheco," was the reply; and then, after a pause, "Here he comes. He is attended by three aides-de-camp and a squadron of orderlies. He carries his head very high."

"But his feet are on the ground," commented Sarrion, who was rolling himself a cigarette. "Shall we invite him to come with us?"

"Yes."

General Pacheco was one of those soldiers of the fifties who owed their success to a handsome face. He wore a huge moustache, curling to his eyes, and had the air of an invincible conqueror—of hearts. He had dined. He was going to take up his new command in the North. He walked, as the French say, on air, and he certainly swaggered in his gait on that thin base. He was hardly surprised to see the Count Sarrion, one of the exclusives who had never accepted Queen Isabella's new military aristocracy, with his hat in one hand and the other extended towards him, on the platform awaiting his arrival.

"You will travel with us," said Sarrion. And the General accepted, looking round to see that his attendants were duly impressed.

"I find," he said, seating himself and accepting a cigarette from Sarrion, "that each new success in life brings me new friends."

"Making it necessary to abandon the old ones," suggested Sarrion.

"No, no," laughed the General, with a cackle, and a patronising hand upheld against the mere thought.

"One only adds to the number as one goes on; just as one adds to a little purse against the change of fortune, eh?"

And he looked from one to the other still, brown face with a cunning twinkle. Sarrion was a man of the world. He knew that this expansiveness would not last. It would probably give way to melancholy or somnolence in the course of half an hour. These things are a matter of the digestion. And many vows of friendship are made by perfectly sober persons who have dined, with a sincerity which passes off next morning. The milk of human kindness should be allowed to stand overnight in order to prove its quality.

"Ah," said Sarrion, "you speak from a happy experience."

"No, no," protested the other, gravely. "It is a small thing—a mere bagatelle in the French Rentes—but one sees one's opportunities, one sees one's opportunities."

He made a gesture with the two fingers that held his cigarette, which seemed to be a warning to the Sarrions not to make any mistake as to the shrewdness of him who spoke to them.

"Speak for yourself," said Sarrion, with a laugh.

"I do," insisted the other, leaning forward. "I speak essentially for myself. One does not mind admitting it to a man like yourself. All the world knows that you are a Carlist at heart."

"Does it?"

"Yes—and you must take comfort. I think you are on the right road now."

"I hope we are."

"I am sure of it. Money. That is the only way. To go to the right people with money in both hands."

He sat back and looked at the Sarrions with his little, cunning eyes twinkling beneath his gold laced cap. The expansiveness would not last much longer. Sarrion's dark glance was diagnosing the man with a deadly skill.

"The thing," he said slowly, "is to strike while the iron is hot."

He spoke in the symbolic way of a people much given to proverbial wisdom and the dark uses of allegory. He might have meant much or nothing. As it happened, the Count de Sarrion meant nothing; for he knew nothing.

"That is what I say. Give me a couple of months, I want no more."

"No?" said Sarrion, looking at him with much admiration. "Is that so?"

"Two months—and the sum of money I named."

"Ah! In two months," reflected Sarrion. "Rome, you know, was not built in a day."

The General gave his cackling laugh.

"Aha!" he cried, "I see that you know all about it. You gave me my cue—the word Rome, eh? To see how much I know!"

And the great soldier-statesman leant back in his seat again, well pleased with himself.

"I understand," he said, "that it amounts to this; the sanction of the Vatican is required to the remittance of the usual novitiate in the case of a young person who is in a great hurry to take the veil; once that is obtained the money is set at liberty and all goes merrily. There

is enough to—well, let us say—to *convince* my whole army corps, and my humble self. And the Vatican will, of course, consent. I fancy that is how it stands."

He tapped his pocket as if the golden "pieces de conviction" were already there, and closed his eye like any common person; like, for instance, his own father, who was an Andalusian innkeeper.

"I fancy that is how it is," said Sarrion, turning gravely to Marcos. "Is it not so?"

"That is how it is," replied Marcos.

The effect of the good dinner was already wearing off. The train had started, and General Pacheco found himself disinclined for further conversation. He begged leave to ease some of the tighter straps and hooks of his smart tunic, opening the collar of solid gold lace that encircled his thick neck. In a few minutes he was asleep beneath the speculative eye of Marcos, who sat in the far corner of the carriage.

The General was going to Saragossa, so they parted from him in the cold, early morning at Castèjon, where an icy wind swept over the plain, and the snow lay thick on the ground.

"It will be cold at Pampeluna!" muttered the General from within the hood of his military cloak. "I pity you! yes, good-bye; close the door."

The station was full of soldiers, and their high peaked caps were at every window of the trains. It was barely yet daylight when the Sarrions alighted at the fortified station in the plain below Pampeluna.

The city stands upon a hill which falls steeply on the northeast side to the bed of the river Arga, a green-

coloured stream deep enough to give additional strength to the walls which tower above like a cliff. Pampeluna is rightly reckoned to be the strongest city in Europe. It is approached from the southwest by a table-land, across which run the high roads from Madrid and the French frontier.

The station lies in the plain across which the railway meanders like a stream. Both bridges across the Arga are commanded, as is the railway station, by the guns of the city. Every approach is covered by artillery.

The sun was rising as the Sarrions' carriage slowly climbed the incline and clanked across the double drawbridges into the city. In the Plaza de la Constitucion, the centre of the town, troops of hopeful dogs followed each other from dust heap to dust heap, but seemed to find little of succulence, whilst what they did find appeared to bring on a sudden and violent indisposition. Perro gazed at them sadly from the carriage window remembering perhaps his own dust heap days.

The Sarrions had no house in Pampeluna. Unlike the majority of the Navarrese nobles they lived in their country house which was only twenty miles away. They made use of the hotel in the corner of the Plaza de la Constitucion when business or war happened to call them to Pampeluna.

They went there now and took their morning coffee.

"Two months," said Sarrion, warming himself at the stove in their simply furnished sitting-room. "Two months, they have given that scoundrel Pacheco to make his preparations."

"Yes ——"

"So that Juanita must make her choice at once."

"They go to vespers in the Cathedral," said Marcos. "It is dusk by that time. They cross the Calle de la Dormitaleria and go through the two patios into the cloisters and enter the Cathedral by the cloister door. If Juanita could forget something and go back for it, I could see her for a few minutes in the cloisters which are always deserted in winter."

"Yes," said Sarrion, "but how?"

"Sor Teresa must do it," said Marcos. "You must see her. They cannot prevent you from seeing your own sister."

"But will she do it?"

"Yes," answered Marcos without any hesitation at all.

"I shall try to see Juanita also," said Sarrion, throwing his cloak round his shoulders twice so that its bright lining was seen at the back, hanging from the left shoulder. "You stay here."

He went out into the cold air. Pampeluna lies fourteen hundred feet above the sea-level, and is subject to great falls of snow in its brief winter season.

Sarrion walked to the Calle de la Dormitaleria, a little street running parallel with the city walls, eastward from the Cathedral gates. There he learnt that Sor Teresa was out. The lay-sister feared that he could not see Juanita de Mogente. She was in class: it was against the rules. Sarrion insisted. The lay-sister went to make inquiries. It was not in her province. But she knew the rules. She did not return and in her place came Father Muro, the spiritual adviser of the school;

Juanita's own confessor. He was a stout man whose face would have been pleasant had it followed the lines that Nature had laid down. But there was something amiss with Father Muro—the usual lack of naturalness in those who lead a life that is against Nature.

Father Muro was afraid that Sarrion could not see Juanita. It was not within his province, but he knew that it was against the rules. Then he remembered that he had seen a letter addressed to the Count de Sarrion. It was lying on the table at the refectory door, where letters intended for the post were usually placed. It was doubtless from Juanita. He would fetch it.

Sarrion took the letter and read it, with a pleasant smile on his face, while Father Muro watched him with those eyes that seemed to want something they could not have.

"Yes," said the Count at length, "it is from Juanita de Mogente."

He folded the paper and placed it in his pocket.

"Did you know the contents of this letter, my father?" he asked.

"No, my son. Why should I?"

"Why, indeed?"

And Sarrion passed out, while Father Muro held the door open rather obsequiously.

CHAPTER XIII

THE GRIP OF THE VELVET GLOVE

On returning to the hotel in the corner of the Plaza de la Constitucion, Sarrion threw down on the table before Marcos the note that Father Muro had given him. He made no comment.

"My dear uncle," the letter ran, "I am writing to advise you of my decision to go into religion. I am prompted to communicate this to you without delay by the remembrance of your many kindnesses to me. You will, I know, agree with me that this step can only be for my happiness in this world and the next. Your grateful niece.—Juanita de Mogente."

Marcos read the letter carefully, and then seeking in his pocket, produced the note that Juanita had passed to him through the hole in the wall of the convent school at Saragossa. It seemed that he carried with him always the scrap of paper that she had hidden within her dress until the moment that she gave it to him.

He laid the two letters side by side and compared them.

"The writing is the writing of Juanita," he said; "but the words are not. They are spelt correctly!"

He folded the letters again, with his determined smile, and placed them in his pocket. Sarrion, smoking a cigarette by the stove, glanced at his son and knew that

Juanita's fate was fixed. For good or ill, for happiness or misery, she was destined to marry Marcos de Sarrion if the whole church of Rome should rise up and curse his soul and hers for the deed.

Sarrion appeared to have no suggestions to make. He continued to smoke reflectively while he warmed himself at the stove. He was wise enough to perceive that his must now be the secondary part. To possess power and to resist the temptation to use it, is the task of kings. To quietly relinquish the tiller of a younger life is a lesson that gray hairs have to learn.

"I think," said Marcos at length, "that we must see Leon. He is her guardian. We will give him a last chance."

"Will you warn him?" inquired Sarrion.

"Yes," replied Marcos, rising. "He may be here in Pampeluna. I think it likely that he is. They are hard pressed. If they get the dispensation from Rome they will hurry events. They will try to rush Juanita into religion at once. And Leon's presence is indispensable. They are probably ready and only awaiting the permission of the Vatican. They are all here in Pampeluna, which is better than Saragossa for such work—better than any city in Spain. They probably have Leon waiting here to give his formal consent when required."

"Then let us go and find out," said Sarrion.

The Plaza de la Constitucion is the centre of the town, and beneath its colonnade are the offices of the countless diligences that connect the smaller towns of Navarre with the capital, which continued to run even in time of war to such places as Irun, Jaca, and even Estella,

where the Carlist cause is openly espoused. Marcos made the round of the diligence offices. He had, it seemed, a hundred friends among the thick-set muleteers in breeches, stockings, and spotless shirt, who looked at him with keen, dust-laden eyes from beneath the shade of their great bêrets. The drivers of the diligences, which were now arriving from the mountain villages, paused in their work of unloading their vehicles to give him the latest news.

They were soft spoken persons with a repressed manner, which characterises both men and women of their ancient race, and they spoke to him in Basque. Some freed their hands from the folds of the long blanket, which each wore according to his fancy, to shake hands with him; others nodded curtly. Men from the valley of Ebro muttered "Buenas"—the curt salutation of Aragon the taciturn.

Marcos seemed to know them by their baptismal names. He even knew their horses by name also, and asked after each, while Perro, affable alike with rich and poor, exchanged the time of day with traveled dogs, all lean and dusty from the road, who limped on sore feet and probably told him of the snow while they lay in the sun and licked their paws. Like his master, he was not proud, but took a wide view of life, so that all varieties of it came within his field of vision.

Then master and dog took a walk down the Calle del Pozo Blanco, where the saddle and harness-makers congregate; where muleteers must come to buy those gay saddle-bags which so soon lose their bright colour in the glaring sun; where the *guardias civiles* step in to buy their

paste and pipe-clay; where the great man's groom may chat with the teamster from the mountain while both are waiting on the saddler's needle.

Finally Marcos passed through the wide Calle de San Ignacio to the drawbridges across the double fosse, where the rope-makers are always at work, walking backwards with an ever decreasing bundle of hemp at their waists and one eye cocked upwards towards the roadway so that they know all who come and go better even than the sentry at the gate. For the sentries are changed three or four times a day, while the rope-maker goes on forever.

Just beyond the second line of fortifications is a halting-place by a low wall where the country women (whom one may meet riding in the plain—dignified, cloaked and hooded figures, startlingly suggestive of a sacred picture) on mule or donkey, stop to descend from their perch between the saddle-bags or panniers. It is a sort of *al fresco* cloakroom where these ladies repair the ravages of wind or storm, where they assemble in the evening to pack their purchases on their beasts of burden, and finally climb to the top of all themselves. For it is not etiquette to ride in or out of the gates upon one's wares; and a breach of this unwritten law would immediately arouse the suspicion of the courteous toll-officer, who fingers delicately with a tobacco-stained hand the bundles and baskets submitted to his inspection.

Here also Marcos had friends, and was able to tell the latest news from Cuba, where some had husband, son or lover; a so-called volunteer to put down the hopeless rebellion, attracted to a miserable death, by the

forty-pound bounty paid by Government. There were old women who chaffed him, and young ones with fine-cut classic features and crinkled hair, who lay in wait for a glance from his grave eyes.

"It is a pity there are not more like you, Señor Conde," said one old peasant; "for it is you that keeps the men from fighting among themselves and makes them tend the sheep or take in the crops. Carlist or Royalist, the land comes before either, say I."

"For it is the land that feeds the children," added another, who carried a pair of small espradrillas in her apron pocket.

Marcos went back to his father with such information as he had been able to gather.

"Leon is here," he said. "He is in Retreat at the monastery of the Redemptionists, which stands half-empty on the road to Villaba. Sor Teresa and Juanita are both well and in the school in the Calle de la Dormitaleria. Mon has been here for some weeks, but went to Madrid four days ago. It is an open secret that Pacheco will go over to the Carlists with his whole army corps for cash down—but he will not take a promise. The Carlists think that their opportunity has come."

"And so do I," said Sarrion. "The Duke of Aosta is the son of Victor Emmanuel, we must remember that. And no son of the man who overthrew the Pope can hope to be tolerated by the clerical party here. The new king will be assassinated, Marcos. I give him six months."

"Will you come this afternoon to the old monastery on the Villaba road and see Leon?" asked Marcos.

"Oh, yes," laughed his father. "I shall enjoy it."

It was the hour of the siesta when they quitted the town on horseback by the Puerta de Rochapea which gives exit to the city on the northern side. It had been sunny since morning, and the snow had melted from the roads, but the hills across the plain were still white and great drifts were piled against the ramparts, forming a natural buttress from the summit of the steep river bank almost to the deep embrasures of the wall.

Marcos turned in his saddle and looked up at these as they rode down the slope. Sarrion saw the action and glanced at Marcos and then at the towering walls. But he made no comment and asked no questions.

There are two old monasteries on the Villaba road; huge buildings within a high wall, each owning a chapel which stands apart from the dwelling-house. It is a known fact that the Carlists have never threatened these buildings which stand far outside the town. It is also a fact that the range of them has been carefully measured by the artillery officers, and the great guns on the city walls were at this time trained on the isolated buildings to batter them to the ground at the first sign of treachery.

Marcos pulled the bell-rope swinging in the wind outside the great door of the monastery, while Sarrion tied the horses to a post. The door was opened by a stout monk whose face fell when he perceived two laymen in riding costume. Humbler persons, as a rule, rang this bell.

"The Marquis de Mogente is here?" said Marcos, and the monk spread out his hands in a gesture of denial.

"THE DOOR WAS OPENED BY A STOUT MONK."

"Whoever is here," he said, "is in Retreat. One does not disturb the devout."

He made a movement to close the door, but Marcos put his thickly booted foot in the interstice. Then he placed his shoulder against the weather-worn door and pushed it open, sending the monk staggering back. Sarrion followed and was in time to place himself between the monk and the bell towards which the devotee was running.

"No, my friend," he said, "we will not ring the bell."

"You have no business here," said the holy man, looking from one to the other with sullen eyes.

"So far as that goes, no more have you," said Marcos. "There are no monasteries in Spain now. Sit down on that bench and keep quiet."

He turned and glanced at his father.

"Yes," said Sarrion, with his grim smile, "I will watch him."

"Where shall I find Leon de Mogente?" said Marcos to the monk. "I do not wish to disturb other persons."

The monk reflected for a moment.

"It is the third door on the right," he said at length, nodding his shaven head towards a long passage seen through the open door.

Marcos went in, his spurred heels clanking loudly in the half-empty house. He knocked at the door of the third cell on the right; for in his way he was a devout person and wished to disturb no man at his prayers. The door was opened by Leon himself, who started back when he saw who had knocked. Marcos went into the

room which was small and bare and whitewashed, and closed the door behind him. A few religious emblems were on the wall above the narrow bed. A couple of books lay on the table. One was open. It was a very old edition of à Kempis. Leon de Mogente's religion was of the sort that felt itself able to learn more from an old edition than a new one. There are many in these days of cheap imitation of the mediæval who feel the same.

Leon sat down on the plain wooden bench and laid his hand on the open book. He looked with weak eyes at Marcos and waited for him to speak. Marcos obliged him at once.

"I have come to see you about Juanita," he said. "Have you given your consent to her taking the veil?"

Leon reflected. He had the air of a man who having been carefully taught a part, loses his place at the first cue.

"What business is it of yours?" he asked, rather hesitatingly at length.

"None."

Leon made a hopeless gesture of the hand and looked at his book with a face of distress and embarrassment. Marcos was sorry for him. He was strong, and it is the strong who are quickest to detect pathos.

"Will you answer me?" he asked.

And Leon shook his head.

"I have come here to warn you," said Marcos, not unkindly. "I know that Juanita has inherited a fortune from her father. I know that the Carlist cause is falling for want of money. I know that the Jesuits will get the money if they can. Because Don Carlos is their

last chance in their last stronghold in Europe. They will get Juanita's money if they can—and they can only do it by forcing Juanita into religion. And I have come to warn you that I shall prevent them."

Leon looked at Marcos and gulped something down in his throat. He was not afraid of Marcos, but he was in terror of some one or of something else. Marcos studied the white face, the shrinking, hunted eyes, with the quiet persistence learnt from watching Nature.

"Are you a Jesuit?" he asked bluntly.

But Leon only drew in a gasping breath and made no answer.

Then Marcos went out and closed the door behind him.

CHAPTER XIV

IN THE CLOISTER

MARCOS and Sarrion went back to Pampeluna in the dusk of the winter evening, each meditating over that which they had seen and heard. Leon had become a Jesuit. And Juanita was worse—infinitely worse than alone in the world.

Marcos needed no telling of all that lay behind Leon's scared silence; for his father had brought him up in an atmosphere of plain language and wide views of mankind. Sarrion himself had seen Navarre ruined, its men sacrificed, its women made miserable by a war which had lasted intermittently for thirty years. He had seen the simple Basques, who had no means of verifying that which their priests told them, fighting desperately and continuously for a lie. The Carlist war has always been the war of ignorance and deceit against enlightenment and the advance of thought. It is needless to say upon which side the cassock has ranged itself.

The Basques were promised their liberty; they should be allowed to live as they had always lived, practically a republic, if they only succeeded in forcing an absolute monarchy on the rest of Spain. The Jesuits made this promise. The society found itself in the position that no promise must be allowed to stick in the throat.

Sarrion, like all who knew their strange story, was

ready enough to recognise the fact that the Jesuit body must be divided into two parts of head and heart. The heart has done the best work that missionaries have yet accomplished. The head has ruined half Europe.

It was the political Jesuit who had earned Sarrion's deadly hatred.

The political Jesuit has, moreover, a record in history which has only in part been made manifest.

William the Silent was assassinated by an emissary of the Jesuits. Maurice of Orange, his son, almost met the same fate, and the would-be murderer confessed. Three Jesuits were hanged for attempting the life of Elizabeth, Queen of England; and later, another, Parry, was drawn and quartered. Two years later another was executed for participating in an attempt on the Queen's life; and at later periods four more met a similar just fate. Ravaillac, the assassin of Henry IV of France was a Jesuit.

The Jesuits were concerned in the Gunpowder Plot of England and two of the fathers were among the executed.

In Paraguay the Jesuits instigated the natives to rebel against Spain and Portugal; and the holy fathers, taking the field in person, proved themselves excellent leaders.

Pope Clement XIV was poisoned by the Jesuits. He had signed a Bull to suppress the order, which Bull was to "be forever and to all eternity valid." The result of it was "*acqua tofana* of Perugia," a slow and torturing poison.

Down to our own times we have had the hand of the Society of Jesus gently urging the Fenians. O'Farrell,

who in 1868 attempted the life of the Duke of Edinburgh in Australia, was a Jesuit sent out to the care of the society in Australia.

The great days of Jesuitism are gone but the society still lives. In England and in other Protestant countries they continue to exist under different names. The "Adorers of Jesus," the Redemptionists, the Brothers of the Christian Doctrine, the Brothers of the Congregation of the Holy Virgin, the Fathers of the Faith, the Order of St. Vincent de Paul—are Jesuits. How far they belong to the heart and not to the head, is a detail only known to themselves. Those who have followed the contemporary history of France may draw their own conclusions from the trials of the case of the Assumptionist Fathers.

"*Los mismos perros, con nuevos cuellos*,"—said Sarrion to any who sought to convince him that Spain owed her downfall to other causes, and that the Jesuits were no longer what they had been. "The same dogs with new collars." And he held that they were not a progressive but a retrogressive society; that their statutes still held good.

"It is allowable to take an oath without intending to keep it when one has good grounds for so acting."

"In the case of one unjustifiably making an attack on your honour, when you cannot otherwise defend yourself than by impeaching the integrity of the person insulting you, it is quite allowable to do so."

"In order to cut short calumny most quickly, one may cause the death of the calumniator, but as secretly as possible to avoid observation."

"It is absolutely allowable to kill a man whenever the general welfare or proper security demands it."

If any man has committed a crime, St. Liguori and other Jesuit writers hold that he may swear to a civil authority that he is innocent of it provided that he has already confessed it to his spiritual father and received absolution. It is, they say, no longer on his conscience.

"Pray," said the founder of the society, "as if everything depended on prayer, and act as if everything depended on action."

"Of what are you thinking?" Sarrion asked suddenly, when they had ridden almost to the city gates in silence.

"I was wondering what Juanita will say, some day, when she knows and understands everything."

"I was not wondering what Juanita will say," confessed Sarrion with a laugh, "but what Evasio Mon will do."

For Sarrion persisted in taking an optimistic view of Juanita and that which must supervene when she had grown into understanding and knowledge.

Marcos went back to the hotel. He had many arrangements to make. Sarrion rode to the large house in the Calle de la Dormitaleria when the school of the Sisters of the True Faith is located to this day. In an hour he joined Marcos in the little sitting-room looking on to the Plaza de la Constitucion.

"All is going well," he said, "I have seen Dolores. They go across to the Cathedral for vespers at five o'clock. It will be almost dark. You have only to wait in the inner patio, adjoining the cloisters. They pass through that way. Juanita will be sent back for

something that is forgotten. And then is your time. You can have ten minutes. It is not long."

"It will do," said Marcos rather gloomily. He was not afraid of the whole Society of Jesuits, of the king, nor yet of Don Carlos. But he feared Juanita.

"We need not inquire who will send her back. But she will come. She will not expect to see you. Remember that and do not frighten her."

So Marcos set out at dusk to await Juanita. The entrance to the two patios that give entrance to the Cathedral cloister is immediately opposite to the door of the school of the Sisters of the True Faith. A lamp swings over the doorway in the Calle de la Dormitaleria. There is no lamp in the first patio but another hangs in the vaulted arch leading from one patio to the other. In the cloister itself, which is the most beautiful in Spain, there are two dim lamps.

Marcos sat down on the wooden bench which runs right round the quadrangle of the inner patio. He had not long to wait. The girls passed through whispering and laughing among themselves. Two nuns led the way. Sor Teresa followed the last two girls, looking straight in front of her between the wings of her great cap. One of the last pair was Juanita. She walked listlessly, Marcos thought. He rose and went towards the archway leading from the inner patio to the cloisters. The moon was rising and cast a white light down upon the delicate stone-work of the cloister windows.

Almost immediately Juanita came hurrying back and instinctively drew her mantilla closer at the sight of his shadowy form. Then she recognised him.

"Oh, Marcos," she whispered. "At last. I thought you had forgotten all about me."

"Quick," he answered. "This way. We have only ten minutes."

He took her hand and hurried her back into the cloisters. He led her to the right, to the corner of the quadrangle farthest removed from the Cathedral where by daylight few pass, and at night none.

"What do you mean?" she asked. "Only ten minutes."

"It has all been arranged," he answered. "I met you here on purpose. You have only ten minutes in which to settle."

"To settle what?" she asked with a laugh.

"Your whole life."

"But one cannot settle one's life in an Ave Maria," she said, which means in the twinkling of an eye. And she looked at him by the dim light and laughed again. For she was young and they had always made holiday together, and laughed.

"Did you mean that letter which you wrote to my father about going into religion?"

"Oh, I don't know. I suppose so. I meant it at the time, Marcos. It seems to be the only thing to do. Everything seems to point to it. Every sermon I hear. Everything I read. Everything any one ever says to me. But now—" she turned and looked at him, "—now that I see you again I cannot think how I did it."

"Am I so very worldly?"

"Of course you are. And yet I suppose you have some chance of salvation. It seems to me that you

have—a little chance, I give you. But it seems hard on other people. Oh, Marcos, I hate the idea of it. And yet they are so kind to me—all except Sor Teresa. If anybody could make me hate it, she would. She is so unkind and gives me all the punishments she can."

Marcos smiled slowly and with great pity, of which men have a better understanding than any woman. He thought he knew why Sor Teresa was cruel.

"They are all so kind. And I know they are good. And they take it for granted that the religious life is the only possible one. One cannot help becoming convinced even against one's will."

She turned to him suddenly and laid her two hands on his arm.

"Oh, Marcos," she whispered, with a sort of sob of apprehension. "Can you not do something for me?"

"Yes," he answered. "That is why I am here. But it must be done at once."

"Why?" she asked. And she was grave enough now.

"Because they have sent to Rome for a dispensation of your novitiate. They wish to hurry you into religion at once."

"Yes," she said. "I know. But why?"

"Because they want your money."

"But I have none, or very little. They have told me so."

"That is a lie," said Marcos, bluntly.

"Oh, but you must not say that," she whispered, with a sort of horror. "Father Muro told me so. He represents Heaven on earth. We are told he does."

"He does it badly," said Marcos, quietly.

Juanita reflected for a moment. Then suddenly she stamped her foot on the pavement worn by the feet of generations of holy men.

"I will not go into religion," she said. "I will not. I always feel that there is something wrong in all they say. And with you and Uncle Ramon it is different. I know at once that what you say is quite simple and plain and honest; that you have no other meaning in what you say but that which the words convey. Marcos—you and Uncle Ramon must take me away from here. I cannot get away. I am hemmed in on every side."

"We can take you away," answered Marcos slowly, "if you like."

She turned and looked at him, her attention caught by some tense note in his voice.

"What do you mean?" she asked. "Your face is so odd and white. What do you mean, Marcos?"

"We can take you away, but you must marry me."

She gave a short laugh and stopped suddenly.

"Oh—you must not joke," she said. "You must not laugh. It is my whole life, remember."

"I am not laughing. It is no joke," said Marcos steadily.

"What . . . ?"

For a moment they sat in silence. The low chanting of vespers came to their ears through the curtained doors of the Cathedral.

"Listen to them," said Juanita suddenly. "They are half asleep. They are not thinking of what they are singing. They are taking snuff surreptitiously behind

their hands to keep themselves awake. And it is we, poor wretched schoolgirls and nuns who have to keep the saints in a good humour by attending to every word and being most preposterously devout whether we feel inclined to be or not. No, I will not go into religion. That is certain. Marcos, I would rather marry you than that—if it is necessary."

"It is necessary."

"But they can have all the money; every 'real,'" suggested Juanita hopefully.

"No; they have tried that way. They cannot do it in these times. The only way they can get the money is for you to go of your own free will into religion and to bequeath of your own free will all your worldly possessions to the Order you join."

"Yes, I know," said Juanita. Her spirits had risen every minute. She was gay again now. His presence seemed to restore to her the happy gift of touching life lightly which is of the heart. And the heart knows no age, neither is it subject to the tyranny of years.

"Well, I will marry you if there is no help for it. But . . ."

"But . . ." echoed Marcos.

"But of course it is only a sort of game, is it not?"

"Yes," he answered. "A sort of game."

"Promise?"

"I promise."

They were sitting on the steps of one of the chapels. Juanita swung round and peered through the railings as if to see what Saint had his habitation there.

"It is only St. Bartholomew," she said, airily. "But

he will do. You have promised, remember that. And St. Bartholomew has heard you. It is only to save me from being a nun that we are being married. And I am to be just the same as I am now. We can go fishing, I mean, as we used to, and climb the mountains and have jokes just as we always do in the holidays."

"Yes," said Marcos.

She held out her hand as she had seen the peasants in Torre Garda when they had struck a bargain and would seal it irrevocably.

"Touch it," she said with a gay laugh, as she had heard them say.

And they shook hands in the dark cloisters.

"There is a window at the end of the passage in which is your room," said Marcos. "It looks out on to a small courtyard and is quite near the ground. Come to that window to-morrow night at ten o'clock and I shall be there."

"What for?" she asked.

"To be married," he answered. "My father and I will arrange it. We shall both be there. If you do not come to-morrow night I shall come again the next night. You will be back in your room by half-past eleven."

"Married?" asked Juanita.

"Yes."

He had risen and was standing in front of her.

"And now you must go back to the Cathedral."

"But Sor Teresa's breviary?"

"She has it in her pocket," said Marcos.

CHAPTER XV

OUR LADY OF THE SHADOWS

THERE were great clouds in the sky when the moon rose the next night and one of them threw Pampeluna into dark shadows when Marcos took his place in the little passage between the School in the Calle de la Dormitaleria and the next building. The window at the end of the passage where Juanita and Sor Teresa and some of the more favoured of the girls had their rooms, was about six feet above the ground.

Marcos took his post immediately underneath and stretching his arm up took hold of one of the two bars, and waited. Juanita looking from the door of her room could thus see his clenched hand and must know that he was waiting. The clocks of the city struck ten. Immediately afterwards the watchmen began their cry. The city was already asleep.

It was very cold. Marcos changed his hand from time to time and breathed on his fingers. He carried a cloak for Juanita. The striking of the quarter found him still waiting beneath the window. But, soon after, Marcos' heart gave a leap to his throat at the touch of cold fingers on his wrist. It was Juanita. He threw the cloak down and placing his heel on the sill of a lower window near the ground he raised himself to the level of the bars.

"Oh, Marcos!" whispered Juanita in his ear, through the open window.

He edged his shoulder in between the two bars which were fixed perpendicularly, and being strongly built he only found room to introduce his two thumbs within that which pressed against his chest. He slowly straightened his arms and the iron gave an audible creak. It was a hundred years old, all rust-worn and attenuated.

"There," he said, "you can get through that."

"Yes," she answered. She was shivering and yet half laughing.

"Listen," she whispered, drawing him towards her. "Sor Teresa's door is open. You can hear her snoring. Listen!"

She gave a half hysterical laugh.

"Quick," said Marcos—dropping to the ground.

Juanita turned sideways and pushed her head and shoulders through the bars. She leant down towards him holding out her arms and her thick plait of hair struck him across the eyes. A moment later he had lifted her to the ground.

"Quick," he said again, breathlessly. He threw the cloak round her and drew the hood forward over her head. Then he took her hand and they ran together down the narrow passage into the Calle de la Domitaleria. She ran as quickly as he did with her long, schoolgirl legs, unhampered by a woman's length of skirt. At the corner Perro, who had been keeping watch there, joined them and trotted by their side.

"What cloak is this?" she asked. "It smells of tobacco."

"It is my old military cloak."

"And this is my wedding dress!" she said, with a breathless laugh. "And Perro is my bridesmaid."

They turned sharply to the left and in a moment stood on the deserted ramparts close under the shadow of the Episcopal Palace. Below them was darkness. To the right, beneath them, the white falls of the river gleamed dimly above the bridge, and the roar of it came to their ears like the roar of the sea.

Far across the plain, the Pyrenees rose, range behind range, a white wall in the moonlight. At their feet the walls of the ramparts, bastion below bastion, broken and crenelated, a triumph of mediæval fortification, faded into the shadow where the river ran.

"There is a snow-drift in this corner," whispered Marcos. "It is piled up against the rampart by the north wind. I will drop you over the wall on to it and then follow you. You remember how to hold to my hand?"

"Yes," she answered, very quick and alert. There was good blood in her veins, which was astir now, in the presence of danger. "Yes—as we used to do it in the mountains—my hand round your wrist and your fingers round mine."

They were standing on the wall now. She knelt down and looked over; then she turned, still on her knees, and clasped her right hand round his wrist while he held hers in his strong grip. She leant forward and without hesitation swung out, suspended by one arm, into the darkness. He stooped, then knelt, and finally lay face downwards on the wall, lowering her all the while.

"Go!" he whispered. And she dropped lightly on to the snow-slope beaten by the wind into an icy buttress against the wall. A moment later he dropped beside her.

"My father is at the bridge," he said, as they scrambled down to the narrow path that runs along the river bank beneath the walls. "He is waiting for us there with a carriage and a priest."

Juanita stopped short.

"Oh, I wish I had not come!" she exclaimed.

"You can go back," said Marcos slowly; "it is not too late. You can still go back if you want to."

But Juanita only laughed at him.

"And know for the rest of my life that I am a miserable coward. And it is of cowards that nuns are made; no, thank you. I will carry it through now. Come along. Come and get married."

She gave a laugh as she led the way. When they reached the road they were in the full moonlight, and for the first time could see each other.

"What is the matter?" said Juanita suddenly. "Your face looks white; there is something I do not understand in it."

"Nothing," answered Marcos. "Nothing. We must be quick."

"You are sure you are keeping nothing back from me?" she asked, glancing shrewdly at him as she walked by his side.

"Nothing," he answered, for the first time, and very conscientiously telling her an untruth. For he was keeping back the crux of the whole affair which he thought she was too young to be told or to understand.

The carriage was waiting on the high road just across the old Roman bridge. Sarrion came forward in the moonlight to meet them. Juanita ran towards him, kissed him and clung to his arm with a little movement of affection.

"I am so glad to see you," she said. "It feels safer. They almost made me a nun, you know. And that horrid old Sor Teresa—oh, I beg your pardon! I forgot she was your sister."

"She is hardly my sister," answered Sarrion with a cynical laugh. "It is against the rules you know to permit oneself any family affection when one is in religion."

"You mustn't blame her for that," said Juanita. "One never knows. You cannot tell why she went into religion. Perhaps she never meant to. You do not understand."

"Oh, yes I do," answered Sarrion bitterly.

They were hurrying towards the carriage and a man waiting at the open door took a step forward and raised his hat, showing in the moonlight a high bald forehead and a clean shaven face. He was slight and neat.

"This is an old school friend of mine," said Sarrion by way of introduction. "He is a bishop," he added.

And Juanita knelt on the road while he laid his hand on her hair with a smile half amused and half pathetic. He looked twenty years younger than Sarrion, and laying aside his sacerdotal manner as suddenly as he had assumed it on Juanita's instinctive initiation, he helped her into the carriage with a grave and ceremonious courtesy.

"This is your own carriage," she said when they were all seated.

"Yes—from Torre Garda," answered Sarrion. "And it is Pietro who is driving. So you are among friends."

"And dear old Perro running at the side," exclaimed Juanita, jumping up and putting her head out of the window to encourage Perro with a greeting. Her mantilla flying in the wind blew across the bishop's face which that youthful-looking dignitary endured with patience.

"And there is a hot-water tin for our feet. I feel it through my slippers; for my feet are wet with the snow. How delightful!"

And Juanita stooped down to warm her hands.

"You have thought of everything—you and Marcos," she said. "You are so kind to me. I am sure I am very grateful . . . to every one."

She turned towards the bishop, kindly including him in this expression of thanks; which she could not do more definitely because she did not know his name. It was obvious that she was not a bit afraid of him seeing that he had no vestments with him.

"At one time, on the ramparts, I was sorry I had come," she explained in a friendly way to him, "but now I am not. Of course it is all very well for me. It is great fun. But for you it is different; on such a cold night. I do not know why everybody takes so much trouble about me."

"Half of Spain is taking trouble about you, my child," was the answer.

"Ah! that is about my money. That is quite

different. But Marcos, you know, and Uncle Ramon are the only people who take any trouble about me, for myself you understand."

"Yes, I understand," answered the great man humbly, as if he were trying to, but was not quite sure of success.

Marcos sat silently in his corner of the carriage. Indeed Juanita exercised the prerogative of her sex and led the conversation, gaily and easily. But when the carriage stopped beneath some trees by the roadside she suddenly lapsed into silence too.

She stood on the road in the bright moonlight and looked about her. She had thrown back the hood of Marcos' military cloak and now set her mantilla in order. Which was all the preparation this light-hearted bride made for the supreme moment. And perhaps she never knew all that she had missed.

"I see no church and no houses," said Juanita to Marcos. "Where are we?"

"The chapel is above us in the darkness," replied Marcos. And he led the way up a winding path.

The little chapel stood on a sort of table-land looking out over the plain that lay to the south of it. In front of it were twelve pines planted in a row at irregular intervals. The shadow of each tree in succession fell upon a low stone cross set on the ground before the door at each successive hour of the twelve; a fantasy of some holy man long dead.

The chapel door stood open and just within it a priest in his short white surplice awaited their arrival. Juanita recognised the sunburnt old cura of Torre Garda.

But he only had time to bow rather formally to her; for a bishop was behind.

"I have only lighted one candle," he said to Marcos. "If we make an illumination they can see it from Pampeluna."

The bishop followed the old priest into the sacristy where the one candle gave a flickering light. There they could be heard whispering together. Sarrion, Marcos and Juanita stood near the door. The moonlight gleamed through the windows and a certain amount of reflected light found its way through the open doorway.

Suddenly Juanita gave a start and clutched at Marcos' arm.

"Look," she said, pointing to the right.

A kneeling figure was there with something that gleamed dully at the shoulders.

"Yes," explained Marcos. "It is a friend of mine, an officer of the garrison who has ridden over. We require two witnesses, you know."

"He is saying his own prayers," said Juanita, looking at him.

"He has not much opportunity," explained Marcos. "He is in command of an outpost at the outlet of the valley of the Wolf."

As they looked at him he rose and came towards them, his spurs clanking and his great sword swinging against the *prie-dieu* chairs of the devout. He bowed formally to Juanita, and stood, upright and stiff, looking at Marcos.

The old cura came from the sacristy and lighted two

candles on the altar. Then he turned with the taper in his hand and beckoned to Marcos and Juanita to come forward to the rails where two stools had been placed in readiness. The cura went back to the sacristy and returned, followed by the bishop in his vestments.

So Juanita de Mogente was married in a little mountain chapel by the light of two candles and a waning moon, while Sarrion and the officer in his dusty uniform stood like sentinels behind them, and the bishop recited the office by heart because he could not see to read. He was a political bishop and no great divine, but he knew his business, and got through it quickly.

He splashed down his historic name with a great flourish of the quill pen in the register and on the certificate which he handed with a bow to Juanita.

"What shall I do with it?" she asked.

"Give it to Marcos," was the answer.

And Marcos put the paper in his pocket.

They passed out of the chapel and stood on the little terrace in the moonlight amid the shadows of the twelve pine trees while the bishop disrobed in the sacristy.

"What are those lights?" asked Juanita, breaking the silence before it grew irksome.

"That is Pampeluna," replied Marcos.

"And the light in the mountains?" she asked, pointing to the north.

"That is a Carlist watch-fire, Señorita," answered the officer briskly, and no one seemed to notice his slip of the tongue except Sarrion, who glanced at him and then decided not to remind him that the title no longer applied to Juanita.

In a few moments the bishop joined them, and they all made their way down the winding path. The bishop and Sarrion were to go by the midnight train to Saragossa, while the carriage and horses were housed for the night at the inn near the station, a mile from the gates; for this was a time of war, and Pampeluna was a fenced city from nightfall till morning.

Marcos and Juanita reached the Calle de la Dormitaleria in safety, however, and Juanita gave a little sigh of fatigue as they hurried down the narrow alley.

"To-morrow," she said, "I shall think this has all been a dream."

"So shall I," said Marcos gravely.

He lifted her into the window, and she stood listening for a moment while she took from her finger the wedding ring she had worn for half an hour and gave it back to him.

"It is of no use to me," she said; "I cannot wear it at school."

She laughed, and held up one finger to command his attention.

"Listen!" she whispered. "Sor Teresa is still snoring."

She watched him bend the bars back again to their proper place.

"By the way," she asked him. "What was the name of the chapel where we were married—I should like to know?"

Marcos hesitated a moment before replying.

"It is called Our Lady of the Shadows."

CHAPTER XVI

THE MATTRESS BEATER

ENGLISHMEN are justly proud of their birthright. The less they travel, moreover, the prouder they are, and the stronger is their conviction that England leads the world in thought and art and action.

They are quite unaware, for instance, that no country in the world is behind England (unless it be Scotland) in a small matter that affects very materially one-third of a human span of life, namely beds. In any town of France, Germany or Holland, the curious need not seek long for the mattress-maker. He is usually to be found in some open space at the corner of a market-place or beneath an arcade near the Mairie exercising his health-giving trade in the open air. He lives, and lives bountifully, by unmaking, picking over and re-making the mattresses of the people. Good housewives, moreover, stand near him with their knitting to see that he does it well and puts back within the cover all the wool that he took out. In these backward countries the domestic mattress is remade once a year if not oftener. In our great land there is a considerable vagueness as to the period allowed to a mattress to form itself into lumps and to accumulate dust or germs. Moreover, there are

thousands of exemplary housekeepers who throw up the eye of horror to their whitewashed ceiling at the thought of a foreign person's personal habits, who do not know what is inside their mattress and never think of looking to see from year's end to year's end.

In Spain, a country rarely visited by those persons who pride themselves upon being particular, the mattress-maker is a much more necessary factor in domestic life than is the sweep or the plumber in northern lands. No palace is too royal for him, no cottage is too humble to employ him.

He is, moreover, the only man allowed inside a nunnery. Which is the reason why he finds himself brought into prominence now. He is usually a thin, lithe man, somewhat of the figure of those northerners who supply the bull-ring with Banderilléros. He arrives in the early morning with a sheathe knife at his waist, a packet of cigarettes in his jacket pocket and two light sticks under his arm. All he asks is a courtyard and the sunshine that Heaven gives him.

In a moment he deftly cuts the stitches of the mattress and lays bare the wool which he never touches with his fingers. The longer stick in his right hand describes great circles in the air and descends with the whistle of a sword upon the wool of which it picks up a small handful. Then the shorter stick comes into play, picks the wool from the longer, throws it into the air, beats it this way and that, tosses it and catches it until every fibre is clear, when the fluffy mass is deftly cast aside. All the while, through the beating of the wool, the two sticks beaten against each other play a distinct air,

and each mattress-maker has his own, handed down from his forefathers, ending with a whole chromatic scale as the shorter stick swoops up the length of the longer to sweep away the lingering wool. Thus the whole mattress is transferred from a sodden heap to a high and fluffy mountain of carded wool, all baked by the heat of the sun.

The man has a hundred attitudes, full of grace. He works with a skill which is a conscious pleasure; a pleasure unknown to those who have never had opportunity of acquiring a manual craft or appreciating the wondrous power that God has put into human limbs. He has complete control over his two thin sticks, can pick up with them a single strand of wool, or half a mattress. He can throw aside a pin that lurks in a ball of wool, or kill a fly that settles on his work, without staining the snowy mass. And all the while, from the moment that the mattress is open till the heap is complete, the two sticks never cease playing their thin and woody air so that any within hearing may know that the "colchonero" is at work.

When the mattress case is empty he pauses to wipe his brow (for he must needs work in the sun) and smoke a cigarette in the shade. It is then that he gossips.

In a Southern land such a worker as this must always have an audience, and the children hail with delight the coming of the mattress-maker. At the Convent School of the Sisters of the True Faith his services were required once a fortnight; for there were many beds; but his coming was none the less exciting for its frequency. He was the only man allowed inside the door. Father

Muro was, it seemed, not counted as a man. And in truth a priest is often found to possess many qualities which are essentially small and feminine.

The mattress-maker of Pampeluna was a thin man with a ropy neck, and keen black eyes that flashed hither and thither through the mist of wool and dust in which he worked. He was considered so essentially a domestic and harmless person that he was permitted to go where he listed in the house and high-walled garden. For nuns have a profound distrust of man as a mass and a confiding faith in the few individuals with whom they have to deal.

The girls were allowed to watch the colchonero at his work, more especially the elder girls such as Juanita de Mogente and her friend Milagros of the red-gold hair. Juanita watched him so closely one spring afternoon that the keen black eyes kept returning to her face at each round of the long whistling stick. The other girls grew tired of the sight and moved away to another part of the garden where the sun was warmer and the violets already in bloom; but Juanita lingered.

She did not know that this was one of Marcos' friends —that in the summer this colchonero took the road with his packet of cigarettes and two sticks and wandered from village to village in the mountains beating the mattresses of the people and seeing the wondrous works of God as these are only seen by such as live all day and sleep all night beneath the open sky.

Quite suddenly the polished sticks ceased playing loudly and dropped their tone to pianissimo, so that if Juanita were to speak she could be heard.

"Hombre," she said, "do you know Marcos de Sarrion?"

"I know the chapel of Our Lady of the Shadows," he answered, glancing at her through a mist of wool.

"Will you give him a letter?"

"Fold it small and throw it in the wool," he said, and immediately the sticks beat loudly again.

Juanita's hand was already in her pocket seeking her purse.

"No, no," he said; "I am too much caballero to take money from a lady."

She walked away, dropping as she passed the uncarded heap, a folded paper which was lost amid the fluff. The sticks flew this way and that, and the twisted note shot up into the air with a bunch of wool which fell across the two sticks and was presently cast aside upon the carded heap. And peeping eyes from the barred windows of the convent school saw nothing.

Marcos and his father had returned to Saragossa. They were people of influence in that city, and Saragossa, strange to say, had a desire to maintain law and order within its walls. It was unlike Barcelona, which is at all times republican and frankly turbulent. Its other neighbour, Pampeluna, remains to this day clerical and mysterious. It is the city of the lost causes; Carlism and the Church. The Sarrions were not looked upon with a kindly eye within the walls of the Northern fortress and it is much too small a town for any to pass unobserved in its streets.

There was work to do in Saragossa. In Pampeluna there were only suspicions to arouse. Juanita was in Sor

Teresa's care and could scarcely come to harm, holding in her hand as she did a strong card to be played on emergency.

All Spain seemed to be pausing breathlessly. The murder of Prim had shaken the land like an earthquake. The king had already made enemies. He had no enthusiasm. His new subjects would have preferred a few mistakes to this cautious pause. They were a people vaguely craving for liberty before they had cast off the habit of servitude.

No Latin race will ever evolve a great republic; for it must be ruled. But Spain was already talking of democracy and the new king had scarcely seated himself on the throne.

"We can do nothing," said Sarrion, "but try to keep order in our own small corner of this bear-garden."

So he remained at Saragossa and threw open his great house there, while Marcos passed to and fro into Navarre up the Valley of the Wolf to Torre Garda.

Where Evasio Mon might be, no man knew. Paris had fallen. The Commune was rife. France was wallowing in the deepest degradation. And in Bayonne the Carlist plotters schemed without let or hindrance.

"So long as he is away we need not be uneasy about Juanita," said Marcos. "He cannot return to Saragossa without my hearing of it."

And one evening a casual teamster from the North, whose great two-wheeled cart, as high as a house and as long as a locomotive, stood in the dusty road outside the Posada de los Reyes, dropped in, cigarette in mouth, to the Palacio Sarrion. In Spain, a messenger delivers

neither message nor letter to a servant. A survival of mediæval habits permits the humblest to seek the presence of the great at any time of day.

The Sarrions had just finished dinner and still sat in the vast dining-room, the walls of which glittered with arms and loomed darkly with great portraits of the Spanish school of painting.

The teamster was not abashed. It was a time of war, and war is a great leveler of social scales. He had brought his load through a disturbed country. He was a Guipuzcoan—as good as any man.

"It was about the Señor Mon," he said. "You wished to hear of him. He returned to Pampeluna two days ago."

The teamster thanked their Excellencies, but he could not accept their hospitality because he had ordered his supper at his hotel. It was only at the Posada de los Reyes in all Saragossa that one procured the real cuisine of Guipuzcoa. Yes, he would take a glass of wine.

And he took it with a fine wave of the arm, signifying that he drank to the health of his host.

"Evasio Mon will not leave us long idle," said Sarrion, when the man had gone, and he had hardly spoken when the servant ushered in a second visitor, a man also of the road, who handed to Marcos a crumpled and dirty envelope. He had nothing to say about it, so bowed and withdrew. He was a man of the newer stamp, for he was a railway worker, having that which is considered a better manner. He knew his place, and that knowledge had affected his manhood.

The letter he gave to Marcos bore no address. It

was sealed, however, in red wax, which had the impress of Nature's seal, a man's thumb—unique and not to be counterfeited.

From the envelope Marcos took a twisted paper, not innocent of carded wool.

"We are going back to Saragossa," Juanita wrote. "I have refused to go into religion, but they say it is too late; that I cannot draw back now. Is this true?"

Marcos passed the note across to his father.

"I wish this was Barcelona," he said, with a sudden gleam in his grave eyes.

"Why?"

"Because then we could pull the school down about their ears and take Juanita away."

Sarrion smiled.

"Or get shot mysteriously from a window while attempting it," he said. "No, we fight with finer weapons than that. Mon has got his dispensation from Rome . . . a few hours too late."

He handed back the note, and they sat in silence for a long time in the huge, dimly-lighted room. Success in life rests upon one small gift—the secret of the entry into another man's mind to discover what is passing there. The greatest general the world has known owed his success, by his own admission, to his power of guessing correctly what the enemy would do next. Many can guess, but few guess right.

"She has not dated her letter," said Sarrion, at length.

"No, but it was written on Thursday. That is the day that the colchonero goes to the Calle de la Dormitaleria."

He drew a strand of wool from the envelope and showed it to Sarrion.

"And the day that Mon returned to Pampeluna. He will be prompt to act. He always has been. That is what makes him different from other men. Prompt and restless."

Sarrion glanced across the table, as he spoke, at the face of his son, who was also a prompt man, but withal restful, as if possessing a reserve upon which to draw in emergency. For the restless and the uneasy are those who have all their forces in the field.

"Do not sit up for me," said Marcos, rising. He stood and thoughtfully emptied his glass. "I shall change my clothes," he said, "and go out. There will be plenty of Navarrese at the Posada de los Reyes. The night *diligencias* will be in before daylight. If there is any news of importance I will wake you when I come in."

It was a dark night, and the wind roared down the bed of the Ebro. For the spring was at hand with its wild march "solano" and hard, blue skies. There was no moon. But Marcos had good eyes, and those whom he sought were men who, after a long siesta, traveled or worked during half the night.

The dust was astir on the Paseo del Ebro, where it lies four inches deep on the broad space in front of the Posada de los Reyes where the carts stand. There were carts here now with dim, old-fashioned lanterns, and long teams of mules waiting patiently to be relieved of their massive collars.

The first man he met told him that Evasio Mon must

have arrived in Saragossa at sunset, for he had passed him on the road, going at a good pace on horseback.

From another he heard the rumour that the Carlists had torn up the line between Pampeluna and Castéjon.

"Go to the station," this informant added. "They will tell you there, because you are a rich man. To me they will tell nothing."

At the station he learnt that this rumour was true; and one who was in the telegraph service gave him to understand that the Carlists had driven the outpost back from the mouth of the Valley of the Wolf, which was now cut off.

"He thinks I am at Torre Garda," reflected Marcos, as he returned to the city, fighting the wind on the bridge.

Chance favoured him, for a man with tired horses stopped his carriage to inquire if that were the Count Marcos de Sarrion. He had brought Juanita to Saragossa in his carriage, not with Sor Teresa, but with the Mother Superior of the school and two other pupils. He had been dismissed at the Plaza de la Constitucion, and the ladies had taken another carriage. He had not heard the address given to the driver.

By daylight Marcos returned to the Palacio Sarrion without having discovered the driver of the second carriage or the whereabouts of Juanita in Saragossa. But he had learnt that a carriage had been ordered by telegraph from a station on the Pampeluna line to be at Alagón at four o'clock in the morning. He learnt also that telegraphic communication between Pampeluna and Saragossa was interrupted.

The Carlists again.

CHAPTER XVII

AT THE INN OF THE TWO TREES

At dawn the next morning, Marcos and Sarrion rode out of the city towards Alagón by the great high road many inches deep in dust which has always been the main artery of the capital of Aragon.

The pace was leisurely; for the carriage they were going to meet had been timed to leave Alagón fifteen miles away at four o'clock. There was but one road. They could scarcely miss it.

It was seven o'clock when they halted at a roadside inn. Sarrion quitted the saddle and went indoors to order coffee while Marcos sat on his tall black horse scanning the road in front of him. The valley of the Ebro is flat here, with bare, brown hills rising on either side like a gigantic mud-fence. Strings of carts were making their way towards Saragossa. Far away, Marcos could perceive a recurrent break in the dusty line. A cart or carriage traveling at a greater than the ordinary market pace was making its laborious way past the heavier traffic. It came at length within clearer sight; a carriage all white with dust and a pair of skinny, Aragonese horses such as may be hired on the road.

The driver seemed to recognise Marcos, for he smiled and raised his hand to his hat as he drew up at the inn,

a recognised halting-place before the last stage of the journey.

Marcos caught sight of a white cap inside the carriage. He leant down on his horse's neck and perceived Sor Teresa, who had not seen him looking out of the carriage window towards the inn. He rode round to the other door and dropped out of the saddle. Then he turned the handle and opened the door. But Sor Teresa had no intention of descending. She leant forward to say as much and recognised her nephew.

"You!" she exclaimed. And her pale face flushed suddenly. She had been a nun for many years and was no doubt a conscientious one, but she had never yet learnt to remove all her love from earth to fix it on heaven.

"Yes."

"How did you know that I should be here?"

"I guessed it," answered Marcos, who was always practical. "You will like some coffee. It is ordered. Come in and warm yourself while the horses rest."

He led the way towards the inn.

"What did you say?" he asked, turning on the threshold; for he had heard her mutter something.

"I said, 'Thank God'!"

"What for?"

"For your brains, my dear," she answered. "And your strong heart."

Sarrion was making up the fire when they entered the room—lithe and young in his riding costume—and he turned, smiling, to meet her. She kissed him gravely. There was always something unexplained between these

two, something to be said which made them both silent.

"There is the coffee," said Marcos, "on the table. We have no time to spare."

"Marcos means," explained Sarrion significantly, "that we have no time to waste."

"I think he is right," said Sor Teresa.

"Then if that is the case, let us at least speak plainly," said Sarrion, "with a due regard," he allowed, with a shrug of the shoulder, "to your vows and your position, and all that. We must not embroil you with your confessor; nor Juanita with hers."

"You need not think of that so far as Juanita is concerned," said Sor Teresa. "It is I who have chosen her confessor."

"Where is she?" asked Marcos.

"She is here, in Saragossa!"

"Why?" asked the man of few words.

"I don't know."

"Where is she in Saragossa?"

"I don't know. I have not seen her for a fortnight. I only learnt by accident yesterday afternoon that she had been brought to Saragossa with some other girls who have been postulants for six months and are about to become novices."

"But Juanita is not a postulant," said Sarrion, with a laugh.

"She may have been told to consider herself one."

"But no one has a right to do that," said Sarrion pleasantly.

"No."

"And even if she were a novice she could draw back."

"There are some Orders," replied Sor Teresa, slowly stirring her coffee, "which make it a matter of pride never to lose a novice."

"Excuse my pertinacity," said Sarrion. "I know that you prefer generalities to anything of a personal nature; but does Juanita wish to go into religion?"

"As much . . ." She paused.

"Or as little," suggested Marcos, who was looking out of the window.

"As many who have entered that life." Sor Teresa completed the sentence without noticing Marcos' interruption.

"And these periods of probation," said Sarrion, reverting to those generalities which form the language of the cloister. "May they be dispensed with?"

"Anything can be dispensed with—by a dispensation," was the reply.

Sarrion laughed, and with an easy tact changed the subject which could scarcely be a pleasant one between a professed nun and two men known all over Spain as leaders in that party which was erroneously called Anti-Clerical, because it held that the Church should not have the dominant voice in politics.

"Have you seen our friend, Evasio Mon, lately?" he asked.

"Yes—he is on the road behind me."

"Behind you? I understood that he left Pampeluna yesterday for Saragossa," said Sarrion.

"Yes—but I heard at Alagón that he was delayed on

the road at the Castéjon side of Alagón—an accident to his carriage—a broken wheel."

"Ah!" said Sarrion sympathetically. He glanced at Marcos who was looking out of the window with a thoughtful smile.

"You yourself have had a hurried journey from Pampeluna," said Sarrion to his sister. "I hear the railway line is broken by the Carlists."

"The damage is being repaired," replied Sor Teresa. "My journey was not a pleasant one, but that is of no importance since I have arrived."

"Why did you come?" asked Marcos, bluntly. He was a plain-dealer in thought and word. If Sor Teresa should embroil herself with her confessor, as Sarrion had gracefully put it, by answering his questions, that was her affair.

"I came to prevent, if I could, a great mistake."

"You mean that Juanita is quite unfitted for the life into which, for the sake of his money, she is being forced or tricked."

"Force has failed," replied Sor Teresa. "Juanita has spirit. She laughed in the face of force and refused absolutely."

"And?" muttered Sarrion.

"One may presume that subtler means were used," answered the nun.

"You mean trickery," suggested Marcos. "You mean that her own words were twisted into another meaning; that she was committed or convicted out of her own lips; that she was brought to Saragossa by trickery, and that by trickery she will be dragged un-

wittingly into religion—you need not shake your head. I am saying nothing against the Church. I am a good Catholic. It is a question of politics. And in politics you must fight with the weapon that the adversary selects. We are only politicians . . . my dear aunt."

"Is that all?" said Sor Teresa, looking at him with her deep eyes which had seen the world before they saw heaven. Things seen leave their trace behind the eyes.

Marcos made no answer, but turned away and looked out of the window again.

"It is a question of mutual accommodation," put in Sarrion in his lighter voice. "Sometimes the Church makes use of politics. And at another time it is politics making use of the Church. And each sullies the other on each occasion. We shall not let Juanita go into religion. The Church may want her and may think that it is for her happiness, but we also have our opinion on that point; we also . . ."

He broke off with a laugh and threw out his hands in a gesture of deprecation; for Sor Teresa had placed her two hands over that part of her cap which concealed her ears.

"I can hear nothing," she said. "I can hear nothing."

She removed her hands and sat sipping her coffee in silence. Marcos was standing near the window. He could see the white road stretched out across the plain for miles.

"What did you intend to do on your arrival in Saragossa if you had not met us?" he asked.

"I should have gone to the Casa Sarrion to warn your father or yourself that Juanita had been taken from my control and that I did not know where she was."

"And then?" inquired Marcos.

"And then I should have gone to Torrero," she answered with a smile at his persistence; "where I intend to go now. Then I shall learn at what hour and in which chapel the ceremony is to take place to-day."

"The ceremony in which Juanita has been ordered to take part as a spectator only?"

Sor Toresa nodded her head.

"It cannot well take place without you?"

"No," she answered. "Neither can it take place without Evasio Mon. One of the novices is his niece, and, where possible, the near relations are necessarily present."

"Yes—I know," said Marcos. He had apparently studied the subject somewhat carefully. "And Evasio Mon is delayed on the road, which gives us a little more time to mature our plans."

Sor Teresa said nothing, but glanced towards Marcos who was watching the road.

"You need not be anxious, Dolores," said Sarrion, cheerfully. "Between politicians these matters settle themselves quietly enough in Spain."

"I ceased to be anxious," replied Sor Teresa, "from the moment that I saw Marcos in the inn yard."

It was Marcos who spoke next, after a short silence.

"Your horses are ready, if you are rested," he said. "We shall return to Saragossa by a shorter route."

"And I again assure you," added Sor Teresa's brother,

"that there is no need for anxiety. We shall arrange this matter quite quietly with Evasio Mon. We shall take Juanita away from your school to-day. Our cousin Peligros is already at the Casa Sarrion awaiting her arrival. Marcos has arranged these matters."

He made a gesture of the hand, presumably symbolic of Marcos' plans, for it was short and sharp.

"There will be nothing for you to do," said Marcos from the window. "Waste no time. I see a carriage some miles away."

So Sor Teresa went on her journey. Her dealings with men had been confined to members of that sex who went about their purpose in an indirect and roundabout way, speaking in generalities, attentive to insignificant detail, possessing that smaller sense of proportion which is a feminine failing and which must always make a tangled jumble of those public affairs in which women and priests may play a part. She had come into actual touch in this little room of an obscure inn with a force which seemed to walk calmly on its way over the petty tyranny that ruled her daily life, which seemed to fear no man, neither God as represented by man, but shaped for itself a Deity, large-minded and manly; Who considered the broad inner purpose rather than petty detail of outward observance.

The Sarrions returned to their gloomy house on the Paseo del Ebro and there awaited the information which Sor Teresa alone could give them. They had not waited long before the driver of her carriage, who had seemed to recognise Marcos on the road from Alagón, brought a note:

"It is at number five, Calle de la Merced, but they will await, E. M."

"And the other carriage that is on the road?" Marcos asked the man. "The carriage which brings the caballero—has it arrived in Saragossa?"

"Not yet," answered the driver. "I have heard from one who passed them on the road that they had a second mishap just after leaving the inn of The Two Trees, where their Excellencies took coffee—a little mishap this one, which will only delay them an hour or less. He has no luck, that caballero."

The man looked quite gravely at Marcos, who returned the glance as solemnly. For they were as brothers, these two, sons of that same mother, Nature, with whom they loved to deal, fighting her strong winds, her heat, her cold, her dust and rivers, reading her thousand and one secrets of the clouds, of night and dawn, which townsmen never know and never even suspect. They had a silent contempt for the small subtleties of a man's mind, and were half ashamed of the business on which they were now engaged.

As the man withdrew in obedience to Marcos' salutation, "Go with God," the clock struck twelve.

"Come," said Marcos to his father, "we must go to number five, Calle de la Merced. Do you know the house?"

"Yes; it is one of the many in Saragossa that stand empty, or are supposed to stand empty. It is an old religious house which was sacked in the disturbances of Christina's reign."

He walked to the window as he spoke and looked out.

The house had been thrown open for the first time for many years, and they now occupied one of the larger rooms looking across the garden to the Ebro.

"Ah! you have ordered the carriage," he said, seeing the brougham standing at the door, and the rusty gates thrown open, giving egress to the Paseo del Ebro.

"Yes," answered Marcos in an odd and restrained voice. "To bring Juanita back."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE MAKERS OF HISTORY

NUMBER five Calle de la Merced is to this day an empty house, like many in Saragossa, presenting to the passer-by a dusty stone face and huge barred windows over which the spiders have drawn their filmy curtain. For one reason or another there are many empty houses in the larger cities of Spain and many historical names have passed away. With them have faded into oblivion some religious orders and not a few kindred brotherhoods.

Number five Calle de la Merced has its history like the rest of the monasteries, and the rounded cobblestones of the large courtyard bear to-day a black stain where, the curious inquirer will be told, the caretakers of the empty house have been in the habit of cooking their bread on a brazier of charcoal fanned into glow with a palm leaf scattering the ashes. But the true story of the black stain is in reality quite otherwise. For it was here that the infuriated people burnt the chapel furniture when the monasteries of Saragossa were sacked.

The Sarrions left their carriage at the corner of the Calle de la Merced, in the shadow of a tall house, for the sun was already strong at midday though the snow lay on the hills round Torre Garda. They found the house

closely barred. The dust and the cobwebs were undisturbed on the huge windows. The house was as empty as it had been these forty years.

Marcos tried the door, which resisted his strength like a wall. It was a true monastic door with no crack through which even a fly could pass.

"That house stands empty," said an old woman who passed by. "It has stood empty since I was a girl. It is accursed. They killed the good fathers there."

Sarrion thanked her and walked on. Marcos was examining the dust on the road out of the corners of his eyes.

"Two carriages have stopped here," he said, "at this small door which looks as if it belonged to the next house."

"Ah!" answered Sarrion, "that is an old trick. I have seen doors like that before. There are several in the Calle San Gregorio. Sitting on my balcony in the Casa Sarrion I have seen a man go into one house and look out of the window of the next a minute later."

"Mon has not arrived," said Marcos, with his eye on the road. "He has the carriage of One-eyed Pedro whose near horse has a circular shoe."

"But we must not wait for him. The risk would be too great. They may dispense with his presence."

"No," answered Marcos thoughtfully, looking at the smaller door which seemed to belong to the next house. "We must not wait."

As he spoke a carriage appeared at the farther end of the Calle de la Merced, which is a straight and narrow street.

"Here they come," he added, and drew his father into a doorway across the street.

It was indeed the carriage of the man known as One-eyed Pedro, a victim to the dust of Aragon, and the near horse left a circular mark with its hind foot on the road.

Evasio Mon descended from the carriage and paid the man, giving, it would seem, a liberal "propina," for the One-eyed Pedro expectorated on the coin before putting it into his pocket.

Mon tapped on the door with the stick he always carried. It was instantly opened to give him admittance, and closed as quickly behind him.

"Ah!" whispered Sarrion, with a smile on his keen face. "I have heard them knock like that on the doors in the Calle San Gregorio. It is simple and yet distinctive."

He turned and illustrated the knock on the balustrade of the stairs up which they had hastened.

"We will try it," he added grimly, "on that door when Evasio has had time to go away from it."

They waited a few minutes, and then went out again into the Calle de la Merced. It was the luncheon hour, and they had the street to themselves. They stood for a moment in the doorway through which Mon had passed.

"Listen," said Marcos in a whisper.

It was the sound of an organ coming almost muffled from the back of the empty house, and it seemed to travel through long corridors before reaching them.

"They had," said Sarrion, "so far as I recollect, a large and beautiful chapel in the patio opposite to that

great door, which has probably been built up on the inside."

Then he gave the peculiar knock on the door. At a gesture from Marcos he stood back so that he who opened the door would need to open it wide and almost come out into the street to see who had summoned him.

They heard the door opening, and the head that came round the door was that of the tall and powerful friar who had come to the assistance of Francisco de Mogente in the Calle San Gregorio. He drew back at once and tried to close the door, but both father and son threw their weight against it and slowly pressed him back, enabling Marcos at length to get his shoulder in. Both men were somewhat smaller than the friar, but both were quicker to see an advantage and take it.

In a moment the friar abandoned the attempt and ran down the long corridor, into which the light filtered dimly through cobwebs. Marcos gave chase while Sarrion stayed behind to close the door. At the corner of the corridor the friar slipped, and, finding himself outmatched, raised his voice to shout. But the cry was smothered by Marcos, who leapt at him like a cat, and they rolled on the floor together.

The friar was heavier and stronger. He had led a simple and healthy life, his muscles were toughened by his wanderings and the hardships of his calling. At first Marcos was underneath, but as Sarrion hurried up he saw his son come out on the top and heard at the same moment a dull thud. It was the friar's head against the floor, a Guipuzcoan trick of wrestling which usually meant death to its victim, but the friar's thick cloak

happened to fall between his head and the hard floor. This alone saved him; for Marcos was a Spaniard and did not care at that moment whether he killed the holy man or not. Indeed Sarrion hastily leant down to hold him back and Marcos rose to his feet with blazing eyes and the blood trickling from a cut lip. The friar would have killed him if he could; for the blood that runs in Southern men is soon heated and the primeval instinct of fight never dies out of the human heart.

"He is not killed," said Marcos breathlessly.

"For which we may thank Heaven," added Sarrion with a short laugh. "Come, let us find the chapel."

They hurried on through the dimly lighted corridors guided by the sound of the distant organ. There seemed to be many closed doors between them and it; for only the deeper and more resonant notes reached their ears. They gained the large patio where the grass grew thickly, and the iron-work of the well in the centre was hidden by the trailing ropes of last year's clematis.

"The chapel is there, but the door is built up," said Sarrion pointing to a doorway which had been filled in. And they paused for a moment as all men must pause when they find sudden evidence that that Sword which was brought into the world nineteen hundred years ago is not yet sheathed.

Marcos had already found a second door leading from the cloister that surrounded the patio, back in the direction from which they had come. They entered the corridor which turned sharply back again—the handiwork of some architect skilful, not in the carrying of sound, but in killing it.

"'He is not killed,' said Marcos, breathlessly."

"It is the way to the organ loft," whispered Marcos. "It is probably the only entrance to the chapel."

They opened a door and were faced by a second one covered and padded with faded felt. Marcos pushed it ajar and the notes of the organ almost deafened them. They were in the chapel, behind the organ, at the west end.

They passed in and stood in the dark, the notes of the great organ braying in their ears. They could hear the panting of the man working at the bellows. Marcos led the way and they passed on into the chapel which was dimly lighted by candles. The subtle odour of stale incense hung heavily in the atmosphere which seemed to vibrate as if the deeper notes of the organ shook the building in their vain search for an exit.

The chapel was long and narrow. Marcos and his father were alone at the west end, concealed by the font of which the wooden cover rose like a miniature spire almost to the ceiling. A group of people were kneeling on the bare floor by the screen which had never been repaired but showed clearly where the carving had been knocked and torn to make the bonfire in the patio.

Two priests were on the altar steps while the choristers were dimly visible through the broken railing of the screen. There seemed to be some nuns within the screen while others knelt without; four knelt apart, as if awaiting admission to the inner sanctum.

"That is Juanita," whispered Marcos, pointing with a steady finger. The girl kneeling next to her was weeping. But Juanita knelt upright, her face half turned so that they could see her clear-cut profile against

the candle-light beyond. To those who study human nature, every attitude or gesture is of value; there were energy and courage in the turn of Juanita's head. She was listening.

Near to her the motionless black form of Sor Teresa towered among the worshippers. She was looking straight in front of her. Not far away a bowed figure all curved and cringing with weak emotion—a sight to make men pause and think—was Leon de Mogente. Behind him, upright with a sleek bowed head, was Evasio Mon. From his position and in the attitude in which he knelt, he could without moving see Juanita, and was probably watching her.

The chapel was carpeted with an old and faded matting of grass such as is made on all the coasts of the Mediterranean. Marcos and Sarrion went forward noiselessly. Instinctively they crossed themselves as they neared the chancel. Evasio Mon was nearest to them kneeling apart, a few paces behind Leon. He could see every one from this position, but he did not hear the Sarrions a few yards behind him.

At this moment Juanita turned round and perceiving them gave a little start which Mon saw. He turned his head to the left; Sarrion was standing in the semi-darkness at his shoulder. Then he turned to the right and there was Marcos, motionless, with a handkerchief held to his lips.

Evasio Mon reflected for a moment; then he turned to Sarrion with his ready smile.

"Do you come here to see me?" he whispered.

"I want you to get Juanita de Mogente away from

this as quickly as possible," returned Sarrion in a whisper. "We need not disturb the service."

"But, my friend," protested Mon, still smiling, "by what right?"

"That you must ask of Marcos."

Mon turned to Marcos in silent inquiry and he received a wordless answer; for Marcos held under his eyes in the half light the certificate of marriage signed by that political bishop who was no Carlist, and was ever a thorn in the side of the Churchmen striving for an absolute monarchy.

Mon shook his head still smiling, more in sorrow than in anger, at the misfortune which his duty compelled him to point out.

"It is not legal, my dear Marcos; it is not legal."

He glanced round into Marcos' still face and perceived perhaps that he might as well try the effect of words upon the stone pillar behind him. He reflected again for a moment, while the service proceeded and the voices of the choir rose and fell like the waves of the sea in a deep cave. It was a simple enough ceremonial denuded of many of the mediæval mummeries which have been revived by a newer emotional Church for the edification of the weak-minded.

Juanita glanced back again and saw Mon kneeling between the two motionless upright men, who were grave while he smiled . . . and smiled.

Then at length he rose to his feet and stood for a moment. If he ever hesitated in his life it was at that instant. And Marcos' hand came forward beneath his eyes pointing inexorably at Juanita. There was a pause

in the service, a momentary silence only broken by the smothered sobs of the novice who knelt next to Juanita.

The organ rolled out its deep voice again, and under cover of the sound Mon stepped forward and touched Juanita on the shoulder. She turned instantly, and he beckoned to her to follow him. If the priests at the altar perceived anything they made no sign. Sor Teresa, absorbed in prayer, never turned her head. The service went on uninterruptedly.

Sarrion led the way and Mon followed. Juanita glanced at Marcos, indicated with a nod Evasio Mon's back, and made a gay little grimace, suggestive of that schemer's discomfiture. Then she followed Mon, and Marcos came noiselessly behind her.

They passed out through the dark passage behind the organ into the old cloister.

There Mon turned to look at Juanita and from her to Marcos. He was distressed for them.

"It is illegal," he repeated, gently. "Without a dispensation."

And by way of reply Marcos handed him a second paper, bearing at its foot the oval seal of the Vatican. It was the usual dispensation, easy enough to procure, for the marriage of an orphan under age.

"I am glad," said Mon, and he tried to look it.

Sarrion went on into the narrow corridor. The friar was sitting on a worm-eaten bench there, leaning back against the wall, his hand over his eyes.

"He is hurt," explained Marcos, simply. "He tried to stop us."

Mon made no comment but accompanied them to the

door, which he closed behind them, and then returned to the chapel, reflecting perhaps upon how small an incident the history of nations may turn. For if the friar had been able to withstand the Sarrions—if there had been a grating to the small door in the Calle de la Merced—Don Carlos de Borbone might have worn the three crowns of Spain.

CHAPTER XIX

COUSIN PELIGROS

THE novitiate dress had been dispensed with, and Juanita wore her usual school-dress of black, with a black mantilla. They therefore walked the length of the Calle de la Merced without attracting undue attention.

Juanita's cheeks were flushed and her eyes bright with excitement. She slipped her hand within Sarrion's arm and gave it a little squeeze of affection.

"How kind of you to come," she said. "I knew I could trust you. I was never afraid."

Sarrion smiled a little dryly and glanced towards Marcos, who had met and overcome all the difficulties, and who now walked quietly by his side, concealing the bloodstains on the handkerchief covering his lips.

Then Juanita let go Sarrion's left arm and ran round behind him to take the other, while with her right hand she took Marcos' left arm.

"There," she cried, with a laugh. "Now I am safe from all the world—from all the world! Is it not so?"

"Yes," answered Marcos, turning to look at her as she moved, her feet hardly touching the ground, between them.

"Why do you look at me like that?" she asked.

"I think you have grown."

"I know I have," she answered gravely. And she stopped in the street to stand her full height and to draw her slim bodice in at the waist. "I am an inch taller than Milagros, but Milagros is getting most preposterously fat. The girls tell her that she will soon be like Sor Dorothea who is so huge that she has to be hauled up from her knees like a sack that has been saying its prayers. That stupid Milagros cries when they say it."

"Is Milagros going to be a nun?" asked Sarrion, absent-mindedly. He was thinking of something else and looked at Juanita with a speculative glance. She was so gay and inconsequent.

"Heaven forbid!" was the reply. "She says she is going to marry a soldier. I can't think why. She says she likes the drums. But I told her she could buy a drum and hire a man to hit it. She is very rich, you know. It is not worth marrying for that, is it?"

"No," answered Marcos, to whom the question had been addressed.

"She may get tired of drums, you know. Just as we get tired saying our prayers at school. I am sure she ought to reflect before she marries a soldier. I wouldn't if I were she. Oh! but I forgot. . . ."

She paused and turning to Marcos she gripped his arm with a confidential emphasis. "Do you know, Marcos, I keep on forgetting that we are married. You don't mind, do you? I am not a bit sorry, you know. I am so glad, because it gets me away from school. And I hate school. And there was always the dread that they would make me a nun despite us all. You don't know what it is to feel helpless and to have a dread; to wake

up with it at night and wish you were dead and all the bother was over."

"It is all over now, without being dead," Marcos assured her, with his slow smile.

"Quite sure?"

"Quite sure," answered Marcos.

"And I shall never go back to school again. And they have no power over me; neither Sor Teresa, nor Sor Dorothea, nor the dear mother. We always call her the 'dear mother,' you know, because we have to; but we hate her. But that is all over now, is it not?"

"Yes," answered Marcos.

"Then I am glad I married you," said Juanita, with conviction.

"And I need not be afraid of Señor Mon, with his gentle smile?" asked Juanita, turning on Marcos with a sudden shrewd gravity.

"No."

She gave a great sigh of relief and shook back her mantilla. Then she laughed and turned to Sarrion.

"He always says 'yes' or 'no'—and only that," she remarked confidentially to him. "But somehow it seems enough."

They had reached the corner of the street now, and the carriage was approaching them. It was one of the heavy carriages used only on state occasions which had stood idle for many years in the stables of the Palacio Sarrion. The horses were from Torre Garda and the men in their quiet liveries greeted her with country frankness.

"It is one of the grand carriages," said Juanita.

"Yes."

"Why?" she asked.

"To take you home," replied Sarrion.

Juanita got into the carriage and sat down in silence. The man who closed the door touched his hat, not to the Sarrions but to her; and she returned the salutation with a friendly smile.

"Where are we going?" she asked after a pause.

"To the Casa Sarrion," was the reply.

"Is it open, after all these years?"

"Yes," answered Sarrion.

"But why?"

"For you," answered Sarrion.

Juanita turned and looked out of the window, with bright and thoughtful eyes. She asked no more questions and they drove to the Palacio Sarrion in silence.

There they found Cousin Peligros awaiting them.

Cousin Peligros was a Sarrion and seemed in some indefinite way to consider that in so being and so existing she placed the world under an obligation. That she considered the world bound, in return for the honour she conferred upon it, to support her in comfort and deference was a patent fact hardly worth putting into words.

"The old families," she was in the habit of saying with a sigh, "are dying out."

At the same time she made a little gesture with outspread palms, and folded her white hands complacently on her lap as if to indicate that society was not left comfortless—that she was still there. From her inferiors she looked for the utmost deference. Her white hands had

never done an hour's work. She was ignorant and idle; but she was a lady and a Sarrion.

Cousin Peligros lived in a little apartment in Madrid, which she fondly imagined to be the hub of the social universe.

"They all come," she said, "to consult the Señorita de Sarrion upon points of etiquette."

And she patted the air condescendingly with her left hand. There are some people who seem to be created by a far-seeing Providence as a solemn warning.

"Cousin Peligros," said Juanita one day, after listening respectfully to a lecture on the care of the hands, "lives in a little field of her own."

"Like a scarecrow," added Marcos, the taciturn.

And this was the lady who awaited them at the Palacio Sarrion. She had been summoned from Madrid by Sarrion, who paid the expenses of the journey; no small item, by the way. For Cousin Peligros, like many people who live at the expense of others, sought to mitigate the bitterness of the bread of charity by spreading it very thickly with other people's butter.

She did not come down to the door to meet them when the carriage clattered over the cobble-stones of the echoing patio.

Such a proceeding might have lowered her dignity in the eyes of the servants, who, to do them justice, saw right through Cousin Peligros into the vacuum that lay behind her. She sat in state in the great drawing-room with her hands folded on her lap and placidly arranged her proposed mode of greeting the newcomers. She had been informed that Sarrion had found it necessary to take

Juanita de Mogente away from the convent school and to assume the cares of that guardianship which had always been an understood obligation mutually binding between himself and Francisco de Mogente.

Cousin Peligros was therefore keenly alive to the fact, that Juanita required at this critical moment of her life a good and abiding example. Hers also was the blessed knowledge that no one in all Spain was better fitted to offer such an example than the Señorita Peligros de Sarrion.

She therefore sat in her best black silk dress in an attitude subtly combining, with a kind tolerance for all who were so unfortunate as not to be Sarrions, a complacent determination to do her duty.

It is to be regretted that she was for a time left sitting thus, for Perro was in the hall, and his greeting of Juanita had to be acknowledged with several violent hugs, which resulted in Juanita's mantilla getting mixed up with Perro's collar. Then there were the pictures and the armour to be inspected on the stairs. For Juanita had never seen the palace with its shutters open.

"Are they all Sarrions?" she exclaimed. "Oh mi alma! What a fierce company. That old gentleman with a spike on top of his hat is a crusader I suppose. And there is a helmet hanging on the wall beneath the portrait, with a great dent in it. But I expect he hit him back again. Don't you think so, Uncle Ramon, if he was a Sarrion?"

"I dare say he did," answered the Count.

"I wish I was a Sarrion," said Juanita, looking up at the armour with a light in her eyes.

"You are one," replied Sarrion, gravely.

She stopped and glanced back over her shoulder at him. Marcos was some way behind, and took no part in the conversation.

"So I am," she said. "I forgot."

And with a little sigh, as of a realised responsibility, she continued her way up the wide stairs. The sight of Cousin Peligros, upright on a chair, dispelled Juanita's momentary gravity, however.

"Oh, Cousin Peligros," she cried, running to her and taking both her hands. "Just think! I have left school. No more punishments—no more grammar—no more arithmetic!"

Cousin Peligros had risen and endeavoured to maintain that dignity which she felt to be so beneficial an example to the world. But Juanita emphasised each item of her late education with a jerk which gradually deranged Cousin Peligros' prim mantilla. Then she danced her round an impalpable mulberry bush until the poor lady was breathless.

"No more Primes at six o'clock in the morning," concluded Juanita, suddenly allowing Cousin Peligros to sit again. "Do you ever go to Primes at six o'clock in the morning, Cousin Peligros?"

"No," was the grave answer. "Such things are not expected of ladies."

"How thoughtful of Heaven!" exclaimed Juanita, with a light laugh. "Then I do not mind being grown-up—and putting up my hair—if you will lend me two hairpins."

She fell on Cousin Peligros' mantilla and extracted

two hairpins from it despite the resistance of the soft white hands. Then she twisted up the heavy plait that hung to her waist, threw back her mantilla and stood laughing before the old lady.

"There—I am grown-up! I am more grown-up than you, you know; for I am . . ."

She broke off, and turning to Sarrion, asked,

"Does she know . . . does she know the joke?"

"No," said Sarrion.

"We are married," she said, standing squarely in front of Cousin Peligros.

"Married . . ." echoed the disciple of etiquette, faintly. "Married—to whom?"

"Marcos and I."

But Cousin Peligros only gasped and covered her face with her hands.

Marcos came into the room at this moment and scarcely looked at Cousin Peligros. Those white hands played so large a part in her small daily life that they were always in evidence, and it did not seem out of place that they should cover her foolish face.

"I found all your clothes ready packed at the school," he said, addressing Juanita. "Sor Teresa brought them with her from Pampeluna. You will find them in your room."

"Oh . . ." groaned Cousin Peligros.

"What is it?" inquired Marcos practically. "What is the matter with her?"

"She has just been told that we are married," explained Juanita, airily. "And I think you shocked her

by mentioning my clothes. You shouldn't do it, Marcos."

And she went and stood by Cousin Peligros with her hand upon her shoulder as if to protect her. She shook her head gravely at Marcos.

Cousin Peligros rose rigidly and walked towards the door.

"I will go," she said. "I will see that your room is in order. I have never before been made an object of ridicule in a gentleman's house."

"But we may surely laugh and be happy in a gentleman's house, may we not?" cried Juanita, running after her, and throwing one arm round her rather unbending and capacious waist. "You are an old dear, and you must not be so solemn about it. Marcos and I are only married for fun, you know."

And the door closed behind them, shutting off Juanita's voluble explanations.

"You see," said Sarrion, after a pause. "She is happy enough."

"Now," answered Marcos. "But she may find out some day that she is not."

Juanita came back before long and found Sarrion alone.

"Where is Marcos?" she asked.

"He is taking a siesta," answered Sarrion.

"Like a poor man."

"Yes, like a poor man. He was not in bed all last night. You had a narrower escape of being made a nun than you suspect."

Juanita's face fell. She went to the window and stood there looking out.

"When are we going to Torre Garda?" she asked, after a long silence. "I hate towns . . . and people. I want to smell the pines . . . and the bracken."

CHAPTER XX

AT TORRE GARDA

THE river known as the Wolf finds its source in the eternal snows of the Pyrenees. Amid the solitary grandeur of the least known mountains in Europe it rolls and tumbles—tossed hither and thither in its rocky bed, fed by this and that streamlet from stony gorges—down to the green valley of Torre Garda.

Here there is a village crouched on either side of the river-bed, and above it on a plateau surrounded by chestnut trees and pines, stands the house of the Sarrions. In winter the wholesome smell of wood smoke rising from the chimneys pervades the air. In summer the warm breath of the pines creeps down the mountains to mingle with the cooler air that stirs the bracken.

Below all, summer and winter, at evening and at dawn, night and day, growls the Wolf—so named from the continuous low-pitched murmur of its waters through the defile a mile below the village. The men of the valley of the Wolf have a hundred tales of their river in its different moods, and firmly believe that the voice which is ever in their ears speaks to such as have understanding, of every change in the weather. The old women have no doubt that it speaks also of those things that must affect the prince and the peasant alike;

of good and ill fortune; of life and of death; of hope and its slow, slow dying in the heart. Certain it is that the river had its humours not to be accounted for by outward things—seeming to be gay without reason, like any human heart, in dull weather, and murmuring dismally when the sun shone and the birds were singing in the trees.

In clearest summer weather, the water would sometimes run thick and yellow for days, the result of some landslip where the snow and ice were melting. Sometimes the Wolf would hurl down a mass of débris—a forest torn from the mountainside by avalanche, the dead bodies of a few stray sheep, or a fox or a wolf or the dun corpse of a mountain bear. Many in the valley had seen tables and chairs and the roof, perhaps, of a house caught in the timbers of the old bridge below the village. And the river, of course, had exacted its toll from more than one family. It was jocularly said at the Venta that the Wolf was Royalist; for in the first Carlist war it had fought for Queen Christina, doing to death a whole company of insurgents at that which is known as the False Ford, where it would seem that a child could pass while in reality no horseman might hope to get through.

The house of Torre Garda was not itself ancient though it undoubtedly stood on the site of some mediæval watch-tower. It had been built in the days of Ferdinand VII at the period when French architecture was running rife over the world, and had the appearance of a Gasçon château. It was a long low house of two stories. Every room on the ground floor opened with long French

windows to a terrace built to the edge of the plateau, where a fountain splashed its clear spring water into a stone basin, where gray stone urns stood on lichen-covered pillars amid flower-beds.

Every room on the first floor had windows opening on a wide balcony which ran the length of the house and was protected from the rain and midday sun by the far-stretching eaves of the roof. The house was of gray stone, roofed with slabs of the same, such as peel off the slopes of the Pyrenees and slide one over the other to the valleys below. The pointed turrets at each corner were roofed with the small green tiles that the Moors loved. The winds and the snow and the rain had toned all Torre Garda down to a cool gray-green against which the four cypress trees on the terrace stood rigid like sentinels keeping eternal guard over the valley.

Above the house rose a pine-slope where the snow lingered late into the summer. Above this again were rocks and broken declivities of sliding stones; and, crowning all, the everlasting snow.

From the terrace of Torre Garda a strong voice could make itself heard in the valley where tobacco grew and ripened, or on the height where no vegetation lived at all. The house seemed to hang between sky and earth, and the air that moved the cypress trees was cool and thin—a very breath of heaven to make thinkers wonder why any who can help it should choose to live in towns.

The green shutters had been closed across the windows for nearly three months, when on one spring morning the villagers looked up to see the house astir and the windows opened wide.

There had been much to detain the Sarrions at Saragossa and Juanita had to wait for the gratification of her desire to smell the pines and the bracken again.

It seemed that it was no one's business to question the validity of the strange marriage in the chapel of Our Lady of the Shadows. Evasio Mon who was supposed to know more about it than any other, only smiled and said nothing. Leon de Mogente was absorbed in his own peculiar selfishness which was not of this world but the next. He fell into the mistake common to ecstatic minds that thoughts of Heaven justify a deliberate neglect of obvious duties on earth.

"Leon," said Juanita gaily to Cousin Peligros, "will assuredly be a saint some day: he has so little sense of humour."

For Leon it seemed could not be brought to understand Juanita's sunny view of life.

"You may look solemn and talk of great mistakes as much as you like," she said to her brother. "But I know I was never meant for a nun. It will all come right in the end. Uncle Ramon says so. I don't know what he means. But he says it will all come right in the end."

And she shook her head with that wisdom of the world which is given to women only; which may live in the same heart as ignorance and innocence and yet be superior to all the knowledge that all the sages have ever put in books.

There were lawyers to be consulted and moreover paid, and Juanita gaily splashed down her name in a bold schoolgirl hand on countless documents.

There is a Spanish proverb warning the unwary never to drink water in the dark or sign a paper unread. And Marcos made Juanita read everything she signed. She was quick enough, and only laughed when he protested that she had not taken in the full meaning of the document.

"I understand it quite enough," she answered. "It is not worth troubling about. It is only money. You men think of nothing else. I do not want to understand it any better."

"Not now; but some day you will."

Juanita looked at him, pen in hand, momentarily grave.

"You are always thinking of what I shall do . . . some day," she said.

And Marcos did not deny it.

"You seem to hedge me around with precautions against that time," she continued, thoughtfully, and looked at him with bright and searching eyes.

At length all the formalities were over, and they were free to go to Torre Garda. Events were moving rapidly in Spain at this time, and the small wonder of Juanita's marriage was already a thing half forgotten. Had it not been for her great wealth the whole matter would have passed unnoticed; for wealth is still a burden upon its owners, and there are many who must perforce go away sorrowful on account of their great possessions. Half the world guessed, however, at the truth, and every man judged the Sarrions from his own political standpoint, praising or blaming according to preconceived convictions. But there were some in high places who knew that a great danger had been averted.

Cousin Peligros had consented to Sarrion's proposal that she should for a time make her home with him, either at Torre Garda or at Saragossa. She had lived in troublous times, but was convinced that the Carlists, like Heaven, made special provision for ladies.

"No one," said she, "will molest me," and she folded her hands in complacent serenity on her lap.

She had a profound distrust of railways, in which common mode of conveyance she suspected a democratic spirit, though to this day the Spanish ticket collector presents himself, hat in hand, at the door of a first-class carriage, and the time-table finds itself subservient to the convenience of any Excellency who may not have finished his coffee in the refreshment-room.

Cousin Peligros was therefore glad enough to quit the train at Pampeluna, where the carriage from Torre Garda awaited them. There were saddle horses for Sarrion and Marcos, and a handful of troops were waiting in the shadow of the trees outside of the station yard. An officer rode forward and paid his respects to Juanita.

"You do not recognise me, Señorita," he said. "You remember the chapel of Our Lady of the Shadows?"

"Yes. I remember," she anwered, shaking hands. "We caught you saying your prayers when we arrived."

He blushed as he laughed; for he was a simple man leading a hard and lonely life.

"Yes, Señorita; why not?"

"I have no doubt," said Juanita, looking at him shrewdly, "that the saints heard you."

"Marcos," he explained, "wrote to ask me for a few men to take your carriage through the danger zone. So I took the liberty of riding with them myself. I am the watch-dog, Señorita, at the gate of your valley. You are safe enough once you are within the valley of the Wolf."

They talked together until Sarrion rode forward to announce that all were ready to depart, while Cousin Peligros sat with pinched lips and disapproving face. She took an early opportunity of mentioning that ladies should not talk to gentlemen with such familiarity and freedom; that, above all, a smile was sufficient acknowledgment for any jest except those made by the very aged, when to laugh was a sign of respect. For Cousin Peligros had been brought up in a school of manners now fortunately extinct.

"He is Marcos' friend," explained Juanita. "Besides, he is a nice person. I know a nice person when I see one," she concluded, with a friendly nod towards the watch-dog of the valley of the Wolf, who was talking in the shade of the trees with Marcos.

The men rode together in advance of the carriages and the luggage carts. The journey was uneventful, and the sun was setting in a cloudless west when the mouth of the valley was reached. It was Cousin Peligros' happy lot to consider herself the centre of any party and the pivot upon which social events must turn. She bowed graciously to Captain Zeneta when he came forward to take his leave.

"It was most considerate of Marcos," she said to Juanita in his hearing, "to provide this escort. He no

doubt divined that, accustomed as I am to living in Madrid, I might have been nervous in these remote places."

Juanita was tired. They were near their journey's end. She did not take the trouble to explain the situation to Cousin Peligros. There are some fools whom the world allows to continue in their folly because it is less trouble. Marcos and Sarrion were riding together now in silence. From time to time a peasant waiting at the roadside came forward to exchange a few words with one or the other. The road ascended sharply now, and the pace was slow. The regular tramp of the horses, the quiet evening hour, the fatigue of the journey were conducive to contemplation and silence.

When Marcos helped Cousin Peligros and Juanita to descend from the high-swung traveling carriage, Juanita was too tired to notice one or two innovations. When, as a schoolgirl, she had spent her holidays at Torre Garde no change had been made in the simple household. But now Marcos had sent from Saragossa such modern furniture as women need to-day. There were new chairs on the terrace. Her own bedroom at the western corner of the house, next door to the huge room occupied by Sarrion, had been entirely refurnished and newly decorated.

"Oh, how pretty!" she exclaimed, and Marcos lingering in the long passage perhaps heard the remark.

Later, when they were all in the drawing-room awaiting dinner, Juanita clasped Sarrion's arm with her wonted little gesture of affection.

"You are an old dear," she said to him, "to have my

room done up so beautifully, so clean, and white, and simple—just as you know I should like it. Oh, you need not smile so grimly. You know it was just what I should like—did he not, Marcos?"

"Yes," answered Marcos.

"And it is the only room in the house that has been done. I looked into the others to see—into your great barrack, and into Marcos' room at the end of the balcony. I have guessed why Marcos has that room . . ."

"Why?" he asked.

"So that you can see down the valley—so that Perro who sleeps on the balcony outside the open window has merely to lift his head to look right down to where the other watch-dogs are, ten miles away."

After dinner, Juanita discovered that there was a new piano in the drawing-room, in addition to a number of those easier chairs which our grandmothers never knew. Cousin Peligros protested that they were unnecessary and even conducive to sloth and indolence. Still protesting, she took the most comfortable and sat with folded hands listening to Juanita finding out the latest waltz, with variations of her own, on the new piano.

Sarrion and Marcos were on the terrace smoking. The small new moon was nearing the west. The night would be dark after its setting. They were silent, listening to the voice of their ancestral river as it growled, heavy with snow, through the defile. Presently a servant brought coffee and told Marcos that a messenger was waiting to deliver a note. After the manner of Spain the messenger was invited to come and deliver his letter in person. He was a traveling knife-grinder, he

explained, and had received the letter from a man on the road whose horse had gone lame. One must be mutually helpful on the road.

The letter was from Zeneta at the end of the valley; written hastily in pencil. The Carlists were in force between him and Pampeluna; would Marcos ride down to the camp and hear details?

Marcos rose at once and threw his cigarette away. He looked towards the lighted windows of the drawing-room.

"No good saying anything about it," he said. "I shall be back by breakfast time. They will probably not notice my absence."

He was gone—the sound of his horse's feet was drowned in the voice of the river—before Juanita came out to the terrace, a slim shadowy form in her white evening dress. She stood for a minute or two in silence, until, her eyes becoming accustomed to the darkness, she perceived Sarrion and an empty chair. Perro usually walked gravely to her and stood in front of her awaiting a jest whenever she came. She looked round. Perro was not there.

"Where is Marcos?" she asked, taking the empty chair.

"He has been sent for to the valley. He has gone."

"Gone!" echoed Juanita, standing up again. She went to the stone balustrade of the terrace and looked over into the darkness.

"I heard him cross the bridge a few minutes ago," Sarrion said quietly.

"He might have said good-bye."

Sarrion turned slowly in his chair and looked at her.

"He probably did not wish his comings and goings to be talked of by Cousin Peligros," he suggested.

"Still, he might have said good-bye . . . to me."

She turned again and leaning her arms on the gray stone she stood in silence looking down into the valley.

CHAPTER XXI

JUANITA GROWS UP

MARCOS' horse, the Moor, had performed the journey to Pampeluna once in the last twelve hours. He was a strong horse accustomed to long journeys. But Marcos chose another, an older and staider animal of less value, better fitted for night work.

He wished to do the journey quickly and return by breakfast-time; he was not in a mood to spare his beast. Men who live in stirring times and meet death face to face quite familiarly from day to day, as Englishmen meet the rain, soon acquire the philosophy which consists in taking the good things the gods send them, unhesitatingly and thankfully.

Juanita was at Torre Garda at last—after months of patient waiting and watching, after dangers foreseen and faced—that was enough for Marcos de Sarrion.

He therefore pressed his horse. Although he was alert and watchful because it was his habit to be so, he was less careful perhaps than usual; he rode at a greater pace than was prudent on such a road, by so dark a night.

The spring comes early on the Southern slope of the Pyrenees. It was a warm night and there had been no rain for some days. The dust lay thickly on the

road, muffling the beat of the horse's feet. The Wolf roared in its narrow bed. The road, only recently made practicable for carriages at Sarrion's expense, was not a safe one. It hung like a cornice on the left-hand bank of the river and at certain corners the stones fell from the mountain heights almost continuously. In other places the heavy stone buttresses had been undermined by the action of the river. It was a road that needed continuous watching and repair. But Marcos had ridden over it a few hours earlier and there had been no change of weather since.

He knew the weak places and passed them carefully. Three miles below the village, the river passes through a gorge and the road mounts to the lip of the overhanging cliffs. There is no danger here; for there are no falling stones from above. It is to this passage that the Wolf owes its name and in a narrow place invisible from the road the water seems to growl after the manner of a wild beast at meat.

Marcos' horse knew the road well enough, which, moreover, was easy here. For it is cut from the rock on the left-hand side, while its outer boundary is marked at intervals by white stones. The horse was perhaps too cautious. By night a rider must leave to his mount the decision as to what hills may be descended at a trot. Marcos knew that the old horse beneath him invariably decided to walk down the easiest declivity. At the summit of the road the horse was trotting at a long, regular stride. On the turn of the hill he proposed to stop, although he must have known that the descent was easy. Marcos touched him with the spur and he

started forward. The next instant he fell so suddenly and badly that his forehead scraped the road.

Marcos was thrown so hard and so far that he fell on his head and shoulder three feet in front of the horse. It was the narrowest place in the whole road, and the knowledge of this flashed through Marcos' mind as he fell. He struck one of the white stones that mark the boundary of the road, and heard his collar-bone snap like a dry stick. Then he rolled over the edge of the precipice into the blackness filled by the roar of the river.

He still had one hand whole and ready, though the skin was scraped from it, and the fingers of this hand were firmly twisted into the bridle. He hung for a moment jerked hither and thither by the efforts of the horse to pick himself up on the road above. A stronger jerk lifted him to the edge of the road, and Marcos, hanging there for an instant, found an insecure foothold for one foot in the root of an overhanging bush. But the horse was nearer to the edge now; he was half over and might fall at any moment.

It flashed through Marcos' mind that he must live at all costs. There was no one to care for Juanita in the troubled times that were coming. Juanita was his only thought. And he fought for his life with skill and that quickness of perception which is the real secret of success in human affairs.

He jerked on the bridle with all the strength of his iron muscle; jerked himself up on the road and the horse over into the gorge. As the horse fell it lashed out wildly; its hind foot touched the back of Marcos' head and seemed almost to break his spine.

He rolled over on his side, choking. He did not lose consciousness at once, but knew that oblivion was coming. Perro, the dog, had been excitedly skirmishing round, keeping clear of the horse's heels and doing little else. He now looked over after the horse and Marcos saw his lean body outlined against the sky. He had let the reins go and found that he was grasping a stone in his bleeding fingers instead. He threw the stone at Perro and hit him. The surprised yelp was the last sound he heard as the night of unconsciousness closed over him.

Juanita had gone to bed very tired. She slept the profound sleep of youth and physical fatigue for an hour. In the ordinary way she would have slept thus all night. But at midnight she found herself wide-awake again. The first fatigue of the body was past, and the busy mind asserted its rights again. She was not conscious of having anything to think about. But the moment she was half awake the thoughts leapt into her mind and awoke her completely.

She remembered again the startling silence of Torre Garda, which was in some degree intensified by the low voice of the river. She lifted her head to listen and caught her breath at the instant realisation of the sound quite near at hand. It was the patter of feet on the terrace below her window. Perro had returned. Marcos must therefore be back again. She dropped her head sleepily on the pillow, expecting to hear some sound in the house indicative of Marcos' return, but not intending to lie awake to listen for it.

She did not fall asleep again, however, and Perro con-

tinued to patter about on the terrace below as if he were going from window to window seeking an entrance. Juanita began to listen to his movements, expecting him to whimper, and in a few moments he fulfilled her anticipation by giving a little uneasy sound between his teeth. In a moment Juanita was out of bed and at the open window. Perro would awake Sarrion and Marcos, who must be very tired. It was a woman's instinct. Juanita was growing up.

Perro heard her, and in obedience to her whispered injunction stood still, looking up at her and wagging his uncouth tail slowly. But he gave forth the uneasy sound again between his teeth.

Juanita went back into her room; found her slippers and dressing-gown. But she did not light a candle. She had acquired a certain familiarity with the night from Marcos, and it seemed natural at Torre Garda to fall into the habits of those who lived there. She went the whole length of the balcony to Marcos' room, which was at the other end of the house, while Perro conscientiously kept pace with her on the terrace below.

Marcos' window was shut, which meant that he was not there. When he was at home his window stood open by night or day, winter or summer.

Juanita returned to Sarrion's room, which was next to her own. The window was ajar. The Spaniards have the habit of the open air more than any other nation of Europe. She pushed the window open.

"Uncle Ramon," she whispered. But Sarrion was asleep. She went into the room, which was large and

sparsely furnished, and, finding the bed, shook him by the shoulder.

"Uncle Ramon," she said, "Perro has come back . . . alone."

"That is nothing," he replied, reassuringly, at once. "Marcos, no doubt, sent him home. Go back to bed."

She obeyed him, going slowly back to the open window. But she paused there.

"Listen," she said, with an uneasy laugh. "He has something on his mind. He is whimpering. That is why I woke you."

"He often whimpers when Marcos is away. Tell him to be quiet, and then go back to bed," said Sarrion.

She obeyed him, setting the window and the jalousie ajar after her as she had found them. But Sarrion did not go to sleep again. He listened for some time. Perro was still pattering to and fro on the terrace, giving from time to time his little plaint of uneasiness between his closed teeth.

At length Sarrion rose and struck a light. It was one o'clock. He dressed quickly and noiselessly and went down-stairs, candle in hand. The stable at Torre Garda stands at the side of the house, a few feet behind it against the hillside. In this remote spot, with but one egress to the outer world, bolts and locks are not considered a necessity of life. Sarrion opened the door of the house where the grooms and their families lived, and went in.

In a few moments he returned to the stable-yard, accompanied by the man who had driven Juanita and Cousin Peligros from Pampeluna a few hours earlier. To-

gether they got out the same carriage and a pair of horses. By the light of a stable lantern they adjusted the harness. Then Sarrion returned to the house for his cloak and hat. He brought with him Marcos' rifle which stood in a rack in the hall and laid it on the seat of the carriage. The man was already on the box, yawning audibly and without restraint.

As Sarrion seated himself in the carriage he glanced upwards. Juanita was standing on the balcony, at the corner by Marcos' window, looking down at him, watching him silently. Perro was already out of the gate in the darkness, leading the way.

They were not long absent. Perro was no genius, but what he did know, he knew thoroughly, which for practical purposes is almost as good. He led them to the spot little more than three miles down the valley, where Marcos lay at the side of the road, which is white and dusty. It was quite easy to perceive the dark form lying there, and Perro's lean limbs shaking over it.

When the carriage returned Juanita was standing at the open door. She had lighted the lamp in the hall and carried in her hand a lantern which she must have found in the kitchen. But she had awakened none of the servants, and was alone, still in her dressing-gown, with her dark hair flying in the breeze.

She came forward to the carriage and held up the lantern.

"Is he dead?" she asked quietly.

Sarrion did not answer at once. He was sitting in one corner of the carriage, with Marcos' head and shoulders resting on his knees.

"I do not know how badly he is hurt," he answered at length. "We called at the chemist's as we came through the village and awoke him. He has been an army servant and is as good as a doctor ——"

"If the Señorita will hold the horses," interrupted the coachman, pushing Juanita gently aside, "we will carry him up-stairs."

And something in the man's manner made her think that Marcos was dead. She was compelled to wait there at least ten minutes, holding the horses. When at length he returned she did not wait to ask questions, but left him and ran up-stairs.

In Marcos' room she found Sarrion lighting a lamp. Marcos had been laid on the bed. She glanced at him, holding her lower lip between her teeth. His face was covered with dust and blood. One blood-stained hand lay across his chest, the other was stretched by his side, unnaturally straight.

Sarrion looked up at her and was about to speak when she forestalled him.

"It is no good telling me to go away," she said, "because I won't."

Then she turned to get a sponge and water. Sarrion was already busy at Marcos' collar, which he had unbuttoned. Suddenly he changed his mind and turned away.

"Undo his collar," he said. "I will go down-stairs and get some warm water."

He took the candle and left Juanita alone with Marcos. She did as she was told and bent over him. Her fingers had caught in a string fastened round

"He left Juanita alone with Marcos."

Marcos' neck. She brought the lamp nearer. It was her own wedding ring, which she had returned to him after so brief a use of it through the bars of the little window looking on to the Calle de la Dormitaleria at Pampeluna.

She tried to undo the knot, but failed to do so. She turned quickly, and took the scissors from the dressing-table and cut the cord, which was a piece of old fishing-line, frayed and worn by friction against the rocks of the river. Juanita hastily thrust the cord into her pocket and drew the ring less quickly on to that finger for which it had been destined.

When Sarrion returned to the room a minute later she was carefully and slowly cutting the sleeve of the injured arm.

"Do you know, Uncle Ramon," she said cheerfully, "I am sure—I am positively certain he will recover, poor old Marcos."

Sarrion glanced at her sharply, as if he had detected a new note in her voice. And his eye fell on her left hand. He made no answer.

CHAPTER XXII

AN ACCIDENT

MARCOS recovered consciousness at daybreak. It was a sign of his great strength and perfect health that he regained all his faculties at once. He moved, opened his eyes, and was fully conscious, like a child awakening from sleep. As soon as his eyes were open they showed surprise; for Juanita was sitting beside him, watching him.

"Ah!" she said, and rose at once to give him some medicine that stood ready in a glass. She glanced at the clock as she did so. The room had been rearranged. It was orderly and simple like a hospital ward.

"Do not try to lift your head," she said. "I will do that for you."

She did it with skill and laid him back again with a gay laugh.

"There," she said. "There is one thing, and one only, that they teach in covents."

As she spoke she turned to write on a sheet of paper the exact hour and minute at which he recovered consciousness. For her knowledge was fresh enough in her mind to be half mechanical in its result.

"Will that drug make me sleep?" asked Marcos, alertly.

"Yes."

"How soon?"

"That depends upon how stale the little apothecary's stock-in-trade may be," answered Juanita. "Probably a quarter of an hour. He is a queer little man and unwashed. But he set your collar-bone like an angel. You have to do nothing but keep quiet. I fancy you will have to be content with a quiet seat in the background for some weeks, amigo mio."

She busied herself as she spoke, with some duties of a sick-nurse which had been postponed during his unconsciousness.

"It is nearly six o'clock," she said, without appearing to look in his direction. "So you need not try to peep round the corner at the clock. Please do not manage things, Marcos. It is I who am manager of this affair. You and Uncle Ramon think that I am a child. I am not. I have grown up—in a night, like a mushroom. And Uncle Ramon has been sent to bed."

She came and sat down at the bedside again.

"And Cousin Peligros has not been disturbed. She has not left her room. She will tell us to-morrow morning that she scarcely slept at all. A real lady never sleeps well, you know. She must have heard us but she did not come out of her room. For which we may thank the Saints. There are some people one would rather not have in an emergency. In fact, when you come to think of it—how many are there in the world whose presence would be of the slightest use in a crisis —one or two at the most."

She held up her finger to emphasise the smallness of this number, and withdrew it again, hastily. But she was not quick enough, for Marcos had seen the ring and

his eyes suddenly brightened. She turned away towards the window, holding her lip between her teeth, as if she had committed an indiscretion. She had been talking against time slowly and continuously to prevent his talking or thinking, to give the apothecary's soothing drug time to take effect. For the little man of medicine had spoken very clearly of concussion and its after-effects. He had posted off to Pampeluna to fetch a doctor from there, leaving instructions that should Marcos recover his reason he should not be permitted to make use of it.

And here in a moment, was Marcos fully in possession of his senses and making a use of them, which Juanita resented without knowing why.

"I must see my father," he said, stirring the bedclothes, "before I go to sleep again."

Juanita turned on her heel, but did not approach him or seek to rearrange the sheets.

"Lie still," she said. "Why do you want to see him? Is it about the war?"

"Yes."

Juanita reflected for a moment.

"Then you had better see him," she said conclusively. "I will go and fetch him."

She went to the window and passed out on to the balcony. Sarrion had, in obedience to her wishes, gone to his room. He was now sitting on a long chair on the balcony, apparently watching the dawn.

"Of what are you thinking as you sit there watching the new light in the mountains?" she asked gaily.

He looked at her with a softness in the eyes which usually expressed a tolerant cynicism.

"Of you," he answered. "I heard the murmur of your voices. You need not tell me that he has recovered consciousness."

"He wants to see you," she said. "I think he was surprised not to see you—to see only me—when he regained his senses."

There was the faintest suspicion of resentment in her voice.

"But I thought that the apothecary said that he was to be kept absolutely quiet," said Sarrion, rising.

"So he did. But he is only a man, you know, just like you and Marcos—and he doesn't understand."

"Oh!" said Sarrion meekly, as he followed her. She led the way into Marcos' room. She was as fresh and rosy as the morning itself, with the delicate pink and white of the convent still in her cheeks. It was on Sarrion's face that the night's work had left its mark.

"Here he is," she said. "He was not asleep. Is it a secret? I suppose it is—you have so many, you two."

She laughed, and looked from one to the other. But neither answered her.

"Shall I go away, Marcos?" she asked abruptly, turning towards the bed, as if she knew at all events that from him she would get a plain answer. And it came, uncompromisingly.

"Yes," he said.

She went to the door with a curt laugh and closed it behind her, with decision. Sarrion looked after her with a sudden frown. He looked for an instant as if he were about to suggest that Marcos might have made a different reply, and then decided to hold his peace. He was

perhaps wise in his generation. Politeness never yet won a woman's love.

Marcos had noted Juanita's lightness of heart. On recovering his senses the first use he had made of them was to observe her every glance and silence. There was no sign of present anxiety or of great emotion. The incident of the ring had no other meaning therefore, than a girlish love of novelty or a taste not hitherto made manifest, for personal ornament. It might have deceived any one less observant than Marcos; less in the habit of watching Nature and dumb animals. He was patient, however, and industrious in the collection of evidence against himself. And she had startled him by saying that she was grown-up; though he perceived soon after, that it was only a manner of speaking; for she was still careless and happy, without a thought of the future, as children are.

These things, however, he kept to himself. He had not sent for his father to talk to him of Juanita. Men never discuss a woman in whom they are really interested, though fools do.

"That horse didn't fall," said Marcos to his father. "He was thrown. There was a wire across the road."

"There was none when I got there," replied Sarrion.

"Then it had been removed. I saw it as we fell. My foot caught in it or I could have thrown myself clear in the usual way."

Sarrion reflected a moment.

"Let me look at the note that Zeneta wrote you," he said.

"You will find it in my pocket, hanging behind the

door. I was a fool. I was in too great a hurry. Now that I think of it, Zeneta would not have written a note like that."

"Then he never wrote it at all," said Sarrion, who had found the paper and was reading it near the window. The clear morning light brought out the wrinkles and the crow's-feet with inexorable distinctness on his keen narrow face.

"What does it mean?" he asked at length, folding the letter and replacing it in the pocket from which he had taken it.

Marcos roused himself with an effort. He was sleepy.

"I think it means that Evasio Mon is about," he answered.

"No man in the valley would have done it," suggested Sarrion.

"If any man in the valley had done it he would have put his knife into me when I lay on the road, which would have been murder."

He gave a short laugh and was silent.

"And the hand inside the velvet glove does not risk murder," reflected Sarrion. "They have not given up the game yet. We must be careful of ourselves."

"And of Juanita."

"I count her as one of ourselves," replied Sarrion quickly, for he heard her voice in the passage. With a brief tap on the door she came in. She was struggling with Perro.

"You have had long enough for your secrets," she said. "And now Marcos must go to sleep. I have

brought Perro to see him. He is so uneasy in his canine mind."

Perro, low-born and eager, needed restraint to keep him from the bed where his master lay, and Juanita continued to hold him while she spoke.

"You must remember," she said, "that it is owing to Perro that you are here at all. If he had not come back and awakened us all you would have been on the road still."

Sarrion glanced sharply at her, his attention caught by her version of that which had really happened. She did not want Marcos to know that it was she who had heard Perro; she, who had insisted that something had happened to Marcos.

"And some Jesuit coming along the road might have found you there," she said, "and pushed you over. It would have been so easy."

Marcos and Sarrion glanced at each other, and possibly Juanita saw the glance as she held Perro back from his master.

"You do not know, Marcos, how they hate you. They could not hate you more if you were a heretic. I have always known it, because Father Muro was always trying to find things out about you in confession. He asked questions about you—who your confessor was; if you did a pilgrimage. I said—be quiet, Perro!—I said you never did a pilgrimage, and you were always changing your confessor because no holy father could stand the strain for long."

She forcibly ejected Perro from the room, and came back breathless and laughing. "She has not a care in

the world," thought Marcos, who knew well enough the danger that he had passed through.

"But Father Muro is such an innocent old love," she went on, "that he did it badly. He had been told to do it by the Jesuits and he made a bungle of it. He thought that he could make a schoolgirl answer a question if she did not want to. And no one was afraid of him. He is a dear, good, old saint, and will assuredly go to Heaven. He is not a Jesuit, you know, but he is afraid of them, as everybody else is, I think ——" She paused and closed the shutters to soften the growing day.

"Except Marcos," she threw back over her shoulder towards the bed, with some far-off suggestion of anger still in her voice.

"And now he must be allowed to sleep until the doctor comes from Pampeluna," she concluded.

She left the room as she spoke to warn the servants, who were already astir, to do their work as noiselessly as possible. When she returned Marcos was asleep.

"The doctor cannot be here for another hour, at least," whispered Sarrion, who was standing by the window watching Marcos. "It is too far for a man of his age to ride, and he has no carriage. There may be some delay in finding one to do so great a distance at this time in the morning. You must take the opportunity to get some sleep."

But Juanita only shook her head and laughed.

Sarrion did not persuade her, but turned to quit the room. His hand was on the door when some one tapped on the other side of it. It was Marcos' servant.

"The doctor, Excellency," he announced briefly.

In the passage stood a man of middle height, hard and wiry, with those lines in his face that time neither obliterates nor deepens; the parallels of hunger. He had been through the first Carlist war nearly thirty years earlier. He had starved in Pampeluna, the hungry, the impregnable.

Sarrion shook hands with him and passed into the room.

"Ah!" he said, in the quiet voice of one who is accustomed to speak in the presence of sleep, when he saw Juanita, "Ah—you!"

"Yes," said Juanita.

"So you are nursing your husband," he murmured abstractedly, as he bent over the bed.

And Juanita made no answer.

"How long has he been asleep?" he asked, after a few moments, and in reply received the written paper which he read quickly, with a practised eye, and laid it aside.

"We must wait," he said, turning to Sarrion, "until he awakes. But it is all right. I can see that while he sleeps. He is a strong man; none stronger in all Navarre."

As he spoke, he was examining the bottles left by the village apothecary, tasting one, smelling another. He nodded approval. In medicine, as in war, one expert may know unerringly what another will do. Then he looked round the room, which was orderly as a hospital ward.

"One sees," he said, "that he has a nun to care for him."

He smiled faintly, so that his features fell into the lines that hunger draws. But Juanita looked at him with grave eyes and did not answer to his pleasantry.

Then he turned to Sarrion.

"It was only by the kindness of a mere acquaintance," he said, "that I was enabled to get here so soon. My own horses were tired out with a hard day yesterday, and I was going out to seek others in Pampeluna—no easy task on market-day—when I met a traveling carriage on the Plaza de la Constitucion. Its owner must have divined my haste, for he offered assistance, and on hearing my story, and whither I was bound, he gave up his intended journey, decided to remain a few days longer in Pampeluna and placed his carriage at my disposal. I hardly know the man at all—though he tells me that he is an old friend of yours. He lives in Saragossa."

"Ah!" said Sarrion, who was listening with rather marked attention.

Juanita had moved away, but she was standing now, listening also, looking back over her shoulder with waiting eyes.

"It was the Señor Evasio Mon," said the doctor. And in the silence that followed, Marcos stirred in his sleep, as if he, too, had heard the name.

CHAPTER XXIII

KIND INQUIRIES

For the next fortnight Juanita remained in supreme command at Torre Garda, exercising that rule which she said she had acquired at the convent school. It had, in reality, come to her straight from Heaven, as it comes to all women. Is it not part of the gentler soul to care for the helpless and the sick? Just as it is in a man's heart to fight the world for a woman's sake.

Marcos made a quick recovery. His broken bones knit together like the snapped branch of a young tree. His cuts and bruises healed themselves unaided.

"He has no nerves," said Juanita. "You should see a nun when she is ill! St. Luke and all the saints have their hands full, I can tell you."

With returning health came energy. Indeed, the patient had never lost his grip of the world. Many from the valley came to make inquiry. Some left a message of condolence. Some departed with a grunt, indicative of satisfaction. A few of the more cultivated gave their names to the servant as they drank a glass of red wine in the kitchen.

"Say it was Pedro from the mill."

"Tell him that Three Fingered Thomas passed by," muttered another, grudgingly.

"It is I, so-called Short Knife, who came to ask," explained a third, tapping the sheath of his baptismal weapon.

"How far have you come?" asked Juanita, who found these gentlemen entertaining.

"Seventeen miles from the mountain," was the reply.

"All your friends are calling to inquire after your health," said Juanita to Marcos. "They are famous brigands, and make one think fondly of the Guardia Civile. There are not many razors in the valley, and I am sure there is no soap."

"They are honest enough, though their appearance may be disquieting."

"Oh! I am not afraid of them," answered Juanita, with a shrewd and mystic smile. "It is Cousin Peligros who fears them. She scolded me for speaking to one of them on the verandah. It undermines the pedestal upon which a lady should always stand. Am I on a pedestal, Marcos?"

She looked back at him over her shoulder, through the fold of her mantilla. It was an opportunity, perhaps, which a skilful lover would have seized. Marcos was silent for a moment. Then he spoke in a repressed voice.

"If they come again," he said, "I should like to see them."

But Juanita had already put into the apothecary's lips a command that no visitors should be admitted.

She kept this up for some days, but was at length forced to give way. Marcos was so obviously on the high road to recovery. There was no suggestion of an

after-effect of the slight concussion of the brain which had rendered him insensible.

It was Short Knife who first gained admittance to the sick-room. He was quite a simple person, smelling of sheep, and endowed with a tact which is as common among the peasantry as amid the great. There was no sign of embarrassment in his manner, and he omitted to remove his bêret from his close-cropped head until he saw Juanita whom he saluted curtly, replacing his cap with a calm unconsciousness before he nodded to Marcos.

"It was you I heard singing the Basque songs as I climbed the hill," he said, addressing Juanita first with the instinct of a gentleman. "You speak Basque?"

"I understand it, at all events, though I cannot speak it as well as Marcos."

"Oh, he!" said the man, glancing towards the bed. "He is one of us—one of us. Do you know the song that the women of the valley sing to their babies? I cannot sing to you for I have no voice except for the goats. They are not particular, the goats—they like music. They stand round me and listen. But if you are passing in the mountain my wife will sing it to you—she knows it well. We have many round the table—God be thanked. It makes them sleep when they are contrary. It tells how easy it is to kill a Frenchman."

Then, having observed the conventionalities, he turned eagerly to Marcos.

Juanita listened to them for a short time while they spoke together in the Basque tongue. Then she went to the balcony and stood there, leaning her arms on the iron

rail, looking out over the valley with thoughtful eyes. She had seen clearly a hundred devices to relieve her of her watch at the bedside. Marcos made excuses for her to absent herself. He found occupations for her elsewhere. With his returning strength came anxiety that she should lead her own life—apart from him.

"You need not try to get rid of me," she said to him one day. "And I do not want to go for a walk with Cousin Peligros. She thinks only of her shoes and her clothes while she walks. I would go for a walk with Perro if I went with any one. He has a better understanding of what God made the world for than Cousin Peligros. But I am not going to walk with any one, thank you."

Nevertheless she absented herself. And Marcos' attempts to find diversions for her, ceased with a suspicious suddenness. She fell into the habit of using the drawing-room which was immediately beneath the sick-room, and spent much of her time at the piano there.

"It keeps Marcos quiet," she explained airily to Sarrion, and vouchsafed nothing further on the subject.

Chiefly because the music of Handel and Beethoven alone had been encouraged by her professors, Juanita had learnt with some enthusiasm the folk songs of the Basques, considered worthy only of the attention of the people. She had a pretty voice, round and young with strange low notes in it that seemed to belong not to her but to some woman who had yet to live and suffer, or, perhaps, be happy as some few are in this uneven world. She had caught, moreover, the trick of slurring from one note to the other, which must assuredly have

been left in Spain by the Moors. It comes from the Far East. It was probably characteristic of those songs that they could not sing by the waters of Babylon, when they hanged their harps upon a tree in the strange land. For it gives to songs, sad or gay, the minor, low clear note of exile. It rings out unexpectedly in strange places. The boatmen of the Malabar Coast face the surf singing no other than the refrain that the Basque women murmur over the cradle. "It keeps Marcos quiet," said Juanita.

"I suppose," she suggested to Marcos one day when she returned to his room and found him quiet, "that when you are well enough to ride you will begin your journeys up and down the valley."

"Yes."

"And your endless watch over the Carlists?"

"They are making good use of their time, I hear," replied Marcos, with the grave appreciation of a good fighter for a worthy foe.

Juanita remembered this now as she stood on the balcony. For he of the Short Knife and Marcos were talking politics—those rough and ready politics of the valley of the Wolf, which dealt but little in words and very considerably in deeds of a bloody nature.

She could hear Marcos talking of the near future when he should be in the saddle again. And her eyes grew gloomy and dark with those velvet depths that lie in hazel eyes when they are grave. Her kingdom was slipping away from her.

She was standing thus when the sound of a horse's feet caught her attention. A horseman was coming up the slope from the village to the castle of Torre Garda.

She looked at him with eyes that had been trained by Marcos in the holiday times to see great distances in the mountains. Then she turned and reentered the sick man's room.

"There is another visitor coming to make inquiry into your welfare—it is Señor Mon."

And she looked for the gleam that immediately lighted Marcos' dark eyes.

Sarrion was out. He had ridden to a distant hamlet earlier in the day. The tidings of this journey might well have reached Evasio Mon's ears. Cousin Peligros was taking the siesta by which she sought to forestall a possible fatigue later in the day. There are some people who seem to have the misfortune to be absent on the rare occasions when they are wanted.

"He is not coming into this room," said Juanita, coolly. "I will go down and see him."

Evasio Mon greeted her with a gay smile.

"I am so glad," he said, "to hear that all goes well with Marcos. We heard of his accident at Pampeluna. I had a day of leisure so I rode out to pay my respects."

He glanced at her, but did not specify whether he had come to pay his respects to her as a bride or to Marcos as an invalid.

"It is a long way to come for a mere politeness," replied Juanita, who could meet smile with smile if need be. But the eyes before which Evasio Mon turned aside were grave enough.

"It is not a mere politeness," he answered. "I have known Marcos since he was a child; and have watched his progress in the world—not always with a light heart."

"That is kind of you," replied Juanita. "But why watch him if it gives you pain?"

Mon laughed. He was quick to see a joke and Juanita, he knew, was a gay soul.

"One cannot help taking an interest in one's friends and is naturally sorry to see them drifting . . ."

"Into what . . . ?" asked Juanita turning to the table where a servant had placed coffee for the visitor.

"Politics."

"Are politics a crime?"

"They lead to many—but do not let us talk of them—" he broke off with a light gesture dismissing as it were an unpleasant topic. "Since you are happy," he concluded, looking at her with benevolent eyes.

He was a man of quick gesture and slow precise speech. He always seemed to mean much more than was conveyed by the mere words he enunciated. Juanita looked quickly at him. What did he know of her happiness? Was she happy—when she came to think of it? She remembered her gloomy thoughts of a few minutes earlier on the balcony. When we are young we confound thoughts with facts. When the heart is young it makes for itself a new heaven and a new earth from a word, a glance, a silence. It is a different earth from this one, but who can tell that it is not the same heaven as that for which men look?

Marcos was talking politics in the room overhead, forgetting her perhaps by now. Evasio Mon's suggestion had come at an opportune moment.

"Leon is much exercised on your account," said Mon, quietly, as if he had divined her thoughts. It was un-

like Leon, perhaps, to be exercised about anything but his own soul; for he was a very devout man. But Juanita was not likely to pause and reflect on that point.

"Why?" she asked.

"He naturally dislikes the idea of your being dragged into politics," answered Mon, gently.

"I? Why should I be dragged into politics?"

Mon made a deprecatory gesture. It seemed that he found himself drawn again to speak of a subject that was distasteful to him. Then he shrugged his shoulders.

"Well," he said, half to himself, "we live in a practical age. Let us be practical. But he would have preferred that you should marry for love. Come, let us change the subject, my child. How is Sarrion? In good health, I hope."

"It is very kind of Leon to exercise his mind on my account," said Juanita steadily. "But I can manage my own affairs."

"Those are my own words," answered Mon soothingly. "I said to him: 'Juanita is no longer a child; Marcos is honest, he will not have deceived her; he must have told her that such a marriage is a mere question of politics; that there is no thought of love.'"

He glanced sharply at her. It was almost prophetic; for Marcos had used the very words. It is not difficult to be prophetic if one can sink self sufficiently to cloak one's thoughts with the mind of another and thus divine the workings of his brain. Juanita remembered that Marcos had told her that this was a matter of politics. Mon was only guessing; but he guessed right. The

greatest men the world has produced only guessed after all; but they did not guess wrong.

"Such a fortune as yours," he said, with an easy laugh, "would make or mar any cause you see. Your fortune is perhaps your misfortune—who knows?"

Juanita laughed also, as at a pleasant conceit. The wit that had baffled Father Muro was ready for Evasio Mon. A woman will take her stand before her own heart and defy the world. Juanita's eyes flashed across the man's gentle face.

"But," she said, "if the fortune is my own; if I prefer that Marcos should have it—to the church?"

Evasio Mon smiled gently.

"Of course," he murmured. "That is what I said to Leon, and to Sor Teresa also, who naturally is troubled about you. Though there are other alternatives. Neither Marcos nor the Church need have it. You could have it yourself as your father, my old and dear friend, intended it."

"How could I have it myself?" asked Juanita, whose curiosity was aroused.

Mon shrugged his shoulders.

"The Pope could annul such a marriage as yours by a stroke of the pen if he wished." He paused, looking at her beneath his light lashes. "And I am told he does wish it. What the Pope wishes—well, one must try to be a good Catholic if one can."

Juanita smiled. She did not perhaps consider herself called upon to admit the infallibility of his Holiness in matters of the heart. She knew better than the Pope. Mon saw that he had struck a false note.

"I am a sentimentalist myself," he said, with a frank laugh. "I should like every girl to marry for love. I should like love to be treated as something sacred—not as a joke. But I am getting to be an old man, Juanita. I am behind the times. Do I hear Sarrion in the passage?"

He rose as he spoke and went towards the door. Sarrion came in at that moment. The Spanish sense of hospitality is strongly Arabic. Mon had ridden many miles. Sarrion greeted him almost eagerly.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE STORMY PETREL

As Juanita quitted the room she heard Sarrion ask Evasio Mon if he had lunched. And Mon admitted that he had as yet omitted that meal. Juanita shrugged her shoulders. It is only in later life that we come to realise the importance of meals. If Mon was hungry he should have said so. She gave no further thought to him. She hated him. She was glad to think that he should have suffered, even if his pain was only hunger. What was hunger, she asked herself, compared with a broken heart? One was a passing pang that could be alleviated, could be confessed to the first comer, while a broken heart must be hidden at any cost from all the world.

She met Cousin Peligros coming towards the drawing-room in her best black silk dress, and in what might have been called a fluster of excitement at the thought of a visitor, if such a word had been applicable to her placid life of self-deception. Juanita made some small jest and laughed rather eagerly at it as she passed the pattern lady on the stairs.

She was very calm and collected; being a determined person, as many seemingly gay and light-hearted people are. She was going to leave Torre Garda and Marcos, who had married her for her money. It is characteristic

of determined people that they are restricted in their foresight. They look in front with eyes so steady and concentrated that they perceive no side issues, but only the one path that they intend to tread. Juanita was going back to Pampeluna, to Sor Teresa at the convent school in the Calle de la Dormitaleria. She recked nothing of the Carlists, of the disturbed country through which she had to pass.

She had never lacked money, and had sufficient now for her needs. The village of Torre Garda could assuredly provide a carriage for the journey; or, at the worst, a cart. Anything would be better than remaining in this house—even the hated school in the Calle de la Dormitaleria. She had always known that Sor Teresa was her friend, though the Sister Superior's manner of indicating friendship had not been invariably comprehensible.

Juanita took a cloak and what money she could find. She was not a very tidy person, and the money had to be collected from odd trinket-boxes and discarded purses. Marcos was still talking politics with his friend from the mountains when she passed beneath his window. Sarrion and Evasio Mon had gone to the dining-room, where, it was to be presumed, Cousin Peligros had followed them. She professed a great admiration for Evasio Mon, who was on familiar terms with people of the highest distinction. An hour's start would be sufficient. In that time she could be half-way to Pampeluna. Secrecy was of course out of the question.

The drawing-room window was open. Juanita paused on the threshold for a moment. Then she went into

the room and scribbled a hurried note—not innocent of blots—which she addressed to Marcos. She left it on the writing-table and carrying her cloak over her arm she hurried down a zigzag path concealed in a thicket of scrub-oak to the village of Torre Garda.

Before reaching the village she overtook a traveling-carriage going at a walking pace down the hill. The carriage, which was old-fashioned in build, and set high upon its narrow wheels, was empty.

"Where are you going?" asked Juanita, of the man who took off his hat to her, almost as if he had expected her.

"I am returning to Pampeluna, empty, Excellency," he answered. "I have brought the baggage of Señor Mon, who is traveling over the mountains on horseback. I am hoping to get a fare from Torre Garda back to Pampeluna, if I have the good fortune."

The coincidence was rather startling. Juanita had always been considered a lucky girl, however; one for whom the smaller chances of daily existence were invariably kind. She accepted this as another instance of the indulgence of fate in small things. She was not particularly glad or surprised. A dull indifference had come over her. The small things of daily life had never engrossed her mind. She was quite indifferent to them now. It was her intention to get to Pampeluna, through all difficulties, and the incidents of the road occupied no place in her thoughts. She was vaguely confident that no one could absolutely stand in her way. Had not Evasio Mon said that the Pope would willingly annul her marriage?

She was thinking these thoughts as she drove through the little mountain village.

"What is that—it sounds like thunder or guns?" inquired Evasio Mon, pausing in his late and simple luncheon in the dining-room.

"A clerical ear like yours should not know the sound of guns," replied Sarrion with a curt laugh. "It is not that, however. It is a cart or a carriage crossing the bridge below the village."

Mon nodded his head and continued to give his attention to his plate.

"Juanita looks well—and happy," he said, after a pause.

Sarrion looked at him and made no reply. He was borrowing from the absent Marcos a trick of silence which he knew to be effective in a subtle war of words.

"Do you not think so?"

"I am sure of it, Evasio."

Sarrion was wondering why he had come to Torre Garda—this stormy petrel of clerical politics—whose coming never boded good. Mon was much too wise to be audacious for audacity's sake. He was not a theatrical man, but one who had worked consistently and steadily for a cause all through his life. He was too much in earnest to consider effect or heed danger.

"I am not on the winning side, but I am sure that I am on the right one," he had once said in public. And the speech went the round of Spain.

After he had finished luncheon he spoke of taking his leave, and asked if he might be allowed to congratulate Marcos on his escape.

"It should be a warning to him," he went on, "not to ride at night. To do so is to court mishap in these narrow mountain roads."

"Yes," said Sarrion, slowly.

"Will his nurse allow me to see him?" asked the visitor.

"His nurse is Juanita. I will go and ask her," replied Sarrion, looking round him quite openly to make sure that there were no letters lying about on the tables of the terrace that Mon might be tempted to read in his absence.

He hurried to Marcos' room. Marcos was out of bed. He was dressing, with the help of his servant and the visitor from the mountains. With a quick gesture, Marcos indicated the open window, through which the sound of any exclamation might easily reach the ear of Evasio Mon.

"Juanita has gone," he said, in French. "Read that note. It is his doing, of course."

"I know now," wrote Juanita, "why you were afraid of my growing up. But I am grown up—and I have found out why you married me."

"I knew it would come sooner or later," said Marcos, who winced as he drew his sleeve over his injured arm. He was very quiet and collected, as people usually are in face of a long anticipated danger which when it comes at last brings with it a dull sense of relief.

Sarrion made no reply. Perhaps he, too, had anticipated this moment. A girl is a closed book. Neither knew what might be written in the hidden pages of Juanita's heart.

A crisis usually serves to accentuate the weakness or strength of a man's character. Marcos was intensely practical at this moment—more practical than ever. He had only one thought—the thought that filled his life—which was Juanita's welfare. If he could not make her happy he could, at all events, shield her from harm. He could stand between her and the world.

"She can only have gone down the valley," he said, continuing to speak in French, which was a second mother tongue to him. "She must have gone to Sor Teresa. He has induced her to go by some trick. He would not dare to send her anywhere else."

"I heard a carriage cross the bridge," replied Sarrion. "He heard it also, and asked what it was. The next moment he spoke of Juanita. The sound must have put the thought of Juanita into his mind."

"Which means that he provided the carriage. He must have had it waiting in the village. Whatever he may undertake is always perfectly organised; we know that. How long ago was that?"

"An hour ago and more."

Marcos nodded and glanced at the clock.

"He will no doubt have made arrangements for her to get safely through to Pampeluna."

"Then where are you going?" asked Sarrion, perceiving that Marcos was slipping into his pocket the arm without which he never traveled in the mountains.

"After her," was the reply.

"To bring her back?"

"No."

Marcos paused for a moment, looking from the win-

dow across the valley to the pine-clad heights with thoughtful eyes. He held odd views—now deemed chivalrous and old-fashioned—on the question of a woman's liberty to seek her own happiness in her own way. Such views are unnecessary to-day when woman is, so to speak, up and fighting. They belong to the days of our grandmothers, who had less knowledge and much more wisdom; for they knew that it is always more profitable to receive a gift than demand a right. The measure will be fuller.

"No. Not unless it is her own wish," he said.

Sarrion made no answer. In human difficulties there is usually nothing to be said. There is nearly always one clear course to steer and the deviations are only found by too much talk and too much licence given to crooked minds. If happiness is not to be found in the straight way nothing is gained by turning into by-paths to seek it. A few find it and a great number are not unhappy who have seen it down a side-path and have yet held their course in the straight way.

"Will you keep him in the library—make the excuse that the sun is too hot on the verandah—until I am gone?" said Marcos. "I will follow and, at all events, see that she arrives safely at Pampeluna."

Sarrion gave a curt laugh.

"We may be able," he said, "to turn to good account Evasio's conviction that you are ill in bed, when in reality you are in the saddle."

"He will soon find out."

"Of course—but in the meantime . . ."

"Yes," said Marcos with a slow smile . . . "in

the meantime." He left the room as he spoke, but turned on the threshold to look back over his shoulder. His eyes were alight with anger and the smile had lapsed into a grin.

Sarrion went down to the verandah to entertain the unsought guest.

"They have given us coffee," he said, "in the library. It is too hot in the sun, although we are still in March! Will you come?"

"And what has Juanita decreed?" asked Mon, when they were seated and Sarrion had lighted his cigarette.

"The verdict has gone against you," replied Sarrion. "Juanita has decreed most emphatically that you are not to be allowed to see Marcos."

Mon laughed and spread out his hands with a characteristic gesture of bland acceptance of the inevitable. The man, it seemed, was a philosopher; a person, that is to say, who will play to the end a game which he knows he cannot win.

"Aha!" he laughed. "So we arrive at the point where a woman holds the casting vote. It is the point to which all men travel. They have always held the casting vote—*ces dames*—and we can only bow to the inevitable. And Juanita is grown up. One sees it. She is beginning to record her vote."

"Yes," answered Sarrion with a narrow smile. "She is beginning to record her vote."

With a Spanish formality of manner, Sarrion placed his horse at the disposition of Evasio Mon, should the traveller feel disposed to pass the night at Torre Garda. But Mon declined.

"I am a bird of passage," he explained. "I am due in Pampeluna again to-night. I shall enjoy the ride down the valley now that your hospitality has so well equipped me for the journey ——"

He broke off and looked towards the open window, listening.

Sarrion had also been listening. He had heard the thud of Marcos' horse as it passed across the wooden bridge below the village.

"Guns again?" he suggested, with a short laugh.

"I certainly heard something," Mon answered. And rising briskly from his chair, he went to the window. Sarrion followed him, and they stood side by side looking out over the valley. At that moment that which was more of a vibration than a sound came to their ears across the mountains—deep and foreboding.

"I thought I was right," said Mon, in little more than a whisper. "The Carlists are abroad, my friend, and I, who am a man of peace must get within the city walls."

With an easy laugh he said good-bye. In a few minutes he was in the saddle riding leisurely down the valley of the Wolf after Juanita—with Marcos de Sarrion in between them on the road.

CHAPTER XXV

WAR'S ALARM

JUANITA'S carriage emerged from the valley of the Wolf into the plain at sunset. She could see that the driver paid but little heed to his horses. His attention wandered constantly to the mountains. For, instead of looking to the road in front, his head was ever to the right, and his eyes searched the plain and the bare brown hills.

At last he pulled up and, turning on his box, held up one finger.

"Listen, Señorita," he said, and his dark eyes were alight with excitement.

Juanita stood up and listened, looking westward as he did. The sound was like the sound of thunder, but shorter and sharper.

"What is it?"

"The Carlists—the sons of dogs!" he answered, with a laugh, and he shook his whip towards the mountains. "See," he said, gathering up the reins again, "that dust on the road to the west—that is the troops marching out from Pampeluna. We are in it again—in it again!"

At the gate of the city there was a crowd of people. The carriage had to stand aside against the trees to let pass the guns which clattered down the slope. The men were laughing and shouting to each other. The officers,

erect on their horses, seemed to think only of the safety of the guns as a woman entering a ballroom reviews her jewelery with a quick comprehensive glance.

At the guard-house, beneath the second gateway, there occurred another delay. The driver was a Pampeluna man and well-known to the sentries. But they did not recognise his passenger and sent for the officer on duty.

"The Señorita Juanita de Mogente," he muttered, as he came into the road—a stout and grizzled warrior smoking a cigarette. "Ah, yes!" he said, with a grave bow at the carriage door. "I remember you as a school-girl. I remember now. Forgive the delay and pass in —Señora de Sarrion."

Juanita was ushered into the little bare waiting-room in the convent school of the Sisters of the True Faith in the Calle de la Dormitaleria. It is a small, square apartment at the end of a long and dark passage. The day filters dimly into it through a barred window no larger than a pocket-handkerchief. Juanita stood on tiptoe and looked into a narrow alley. On the sill of this window Marcos had stood to wrench apart the bars of the window immediately overhead, through which he had lifted her one cold night—years and years ago, it seemed.

Nothing had changed in this gloomy house.

"The dear Sister Superior is at prayer in the chapel," the doorkeeper had whispered. The usual formula; for a nun must always be given the benefit of the doubt. If she is alone in her cell or in the chapel it is always piously assumed that she is at prayer. Juanita smiled at the familiar words.

"Then I will wait," she said, "but not very long."

She gave the nun a familiar little nod of warning as if to intimate that no tricks of the trade need be tried upon her.

She stood alone in the little gray, dim room now, and waited with brooding eyes. Within, all was quiet with that air of awesome mystery peculiar to the cloister, which so soon gives place with increasing familiarity, to a sense of deadly monotony. It is only from outside that the mystery of the cloister continues to interest. Juanita knew every stone in this silent house. Its daily round of artificial duties appeared small to her eyes.

"They have nothing to do all day in a nunnery," she once said to Marcos in jest. "So they rise up very early in the morning to do it."

She had laughed on first seeing the mark of Marcos' heel on the window-sill. She turned and looked at it again now—without laughing. And she thought of Torre Garda with its keen air, cool to the cheek like spring water; with the scent of the bracken that she loved; with the tall, still pines, upright against the sky, motionless, whispering with the wind.

She had always thought that the cloister represented safety and peace in a world of strife. And now that she was back within the walls she felt that it was better to be in the world, to take part in the strife, if necessary; for Heaven had given her a proud and a fierce heart. She would rather be miserable here all her life than go back to Marcos, who had dared to marry her without loving her.

The door of the waiting-room opened and Sor Teresa stood on the threshold.

"I have come back," said Juanita. "I think I shall go into religion. I have left Torre Garda."

She gave a short laugh and looked curiously at Sor Teresa—impassive in her straight-hanging robes.

"So you have got me back," she said. "Back to the convent."

"Not to this convent," replied Sor Teresa, quietly.

"But I have come back. I shall come back—the Mother Superior . . ."

"The Mother Superior is in Saragossa. I am mistress here," replied Sor Teresa, standing still and dark, like one of the pines at Torre Garda. The Sarrion blood was rising to her pale cheek. Her eyes glowed darkly beneath her overshadowing head-dress. Command—that indefinable spirit which is vouchsafed to gentle people, while rough and strong men miss it—was written in every line of her face, every fold of her dress, in the quiet of her small, white hands, resting motionless against her skirt.

Juanita stood looking at her with flashing eyes, with her head thrown back, with clenched hands.

"Then I will go somewhere else. But I do not understand you. You always wanted me to go into religion."

Sor Teresa held up one hand and cut short her speech. For the habit of obedience is so strong that clear-headed men will deliberately go to their death rather than relinquish it. The gesture was known to Juanita. It was dreaded in the school.

"Think—" said Sor Teresa. "Think—before you say that."

"Well," argued Juanita, "if you did not urge me in words, you used every means in your power to induce me to take the veil—to make it impossible for me to do anything else."

"Think!" urged Sor Teresa. "Think again. Do not include me in such generalities without thinking."

Juanita paused. She ran back in her mind over a hundred incidents of school life, remembered, as such are, with photographic accuracy.

"Well," she admitted at length. "You did your best to make me hate it—at all events."

"Ah!" said Sor Teresa, with a slow smile.

"Then you did not want me to go into religion—" Juanita came a step nearer and peered into Sor Teresa's face. She might as well have sought an answer in a face of stone.

"Answer me," she said impatiently.

"All are not suited for the religious life," answered the Sister Superior after the manner of her teaching. "I have known many such, and I have seen much sorrow arising from a mistaken sense of duty. I have heard of lives wrecked by it—I have known of two."

Juanita who had moved away impatiently, now turned and looked at Sor Teresa. The gloom of evening was gathering in the little bare room. The stillness of the convent was oppressive.

"Were *you* suited to the religious life?" asked the girl suddenly.

But Sor Teresa made no answer.

Juanita sat suddenly down. Her movements were quick and impulsive still, as they had been when she was

a schoolgirl. When she had arrived at the convent she had felt hungry and tired. The feelings came back to her with renewed intensity now. She was sick at heart. The gray twilight within these walls was like the gloom of a hopeless life.

"I wonder who the other was," she said, half to herself. For the world was opening out before her like a great book hitherto closed. The lives of men and women had gained depth and meaning in a flash of thought.

She rose and impulsively kissed Sor Teresa.

"I used to be afraid of you," she said, with a laugh which seemed to surprise her, as if the voice that had spoken was not her own. Then she sat down again. It was almost dark in the room now, and the window glimmered a forlorn gray.

"I am so hungry and tired," said Juanita in rather a faint voice, "but I am glad I came. I could not stay in Torre Garda another hour. Marcos married me for my money. The money was wanted for political purposes. They could not get it without me—so I was thrown in."

She dropped her two hands heavily on the table and looked up as if expecting some exclamation of surprise or horror. But her hearer made no sign.

"Did you know this?" she asked, in an altered voice after a pause. "Are you in the plot, too, as well as Marcos and Uncle Ramon? Have you been scheming all this time as well, that I should marry Marcos?"

"Since you ask me," said Sor Teresa, slowly and coldly, "I think you would be happier married to Marcos

than in religion. It is only my opinion, of course, and you must decide for yourself. It is probably the opinion of others, however, as well. There are plenty of girls who . . ."

"Oh! are there?" cried Juanita, passionately. "Who —I should like to know?"

"I am only speaking in generalities, my child."

Juanita looked at her suspiciously, her April eyes glittering with a new light.

"I thought you meant Milagros. He once said that he thought her pretty, and liked her hair. It is red, everybody knows that. Besides, we are married."

She dropped her tired head upon her folded arms—a schoolgirl attitude which returned naturally to her amid the old surroundings.

"I don't care what becomes of me," she said wearily. "I don't know what to do. It is very hard that papa should be dead and Leon . . . Leon such a preposterous stupid. You know he is."

Sor Teresa did not deny this sisterly truth; but stood motionless, waiting for Juanita's decision.

"I am so hungry and tired," she said at length. "I suppose I can have something to eat . . . if I pay for it."

"Yes; you can have something to eat."

"And I may be allowed to stay here to-night, at all events."

"No, you cannot do that," answered the Sister Superior.

Juanita looked up in surprise.

"Then what am I to do? Where am I to go?"

"Back to your husband," was the reply in the same gentle, inexorable voice. "I will take you back to Marcos—that is all I will do for you. I will take you myself."

Juanita laughed scornfully and shook her head. She had plenty of that spirit which will fight to the end and overcome fatigue and hunger.

"You may be mistress here," she said. "But I do not think you can deny me a lodging. You cannot turn me out into the street."

"Under exceptional circumstances I can do both."

"Ah!" muttered Juanita, incredulously.

"And those circumstances have arisen. There, you can satisfy yourself."

She laid before Juanita, on the bare table, a paper which it was not possible to read in the semi-darkness. She turned to the mantelpiece, where two tall candles added to the sacerdotal simplicity of the room. While the sulphur match burnt blue, Juanita looked indifferently at the printed paper.

"It is a siege notice," said Sor Teresa, seeing that her hearer refused to read. "It is signed by General Pacheco, who arrived here with a large army to-day. It is expected that Pampeluna may be besieged by to-morrow evening. The investment may be a long one, which will mean starvation. Every householder must make a return of those dwelling under his roof. He must refuse domicile to any strangers; and I refuse to take you into this house."

Juanita read the paper now by the light of the candles which Sor Teresa set on the table. It was a curt,

military document without explanation or unnecessary mitigation of the truth. For Pampeluna had seen the like before and understood this business thoroughly.

"You can think about it," said Sor Teresa, folding the paper and placing it in her pocket. "I will send you something to eat and drink in this room."

She closed the door, leaving Juanita to realise the grim fact that—shape our lives how we will, with all foresight—every care—the history of the world or of a nation will suddenly break into the story of the single life and march over it with a giant stride.

Presently a lay-sister brought refreshments and set the tray on the table without speaking. Juanita knew her well—and she, doubtless, knew Juanita's story; for her pious face was drawn into lines indicative of the deepest disapproval.

Juanita ate heartily enough, not noticing the cold simplicity of the fare. She had finished before Sor Teresa returned and without thinking of what she was doing, had rearranged the tray after the manner of the refectory. She was standing by the window which she had opened. The sounds of war came into the room with startling distinctness. The boom of the distant guns disputing the advance of the Carlists; while nearer, the bugles called the men to arms and the heavy tramp of feet came and went in the Calle de la Dormitaleria.

"Well," asked Sor Teresa. "What have you decided to do?"

Juanita listened to the alarm of war for a moment before turning from the window.

"It is not a false alarm?" she inquired. "The Carlists are really out?"

For she had fallen into the habit of the Northern Provinces, of speaking of the insurrection as if it were a recurrent flood.

"They have been preparing all the winter," answered Sor Teresa.

"And Pampeluna is to be invested?"

"Yes."

"And Torre Garda . . .?"

"Torre Garda," answered the nun, "is to be taken this time. The Carlists have decided to besiege it. It is at the mouth of the valley that the fighting is taking place."

"Then I will go back to Torre Garda," said Juanita.

CHAPTER XXVI

AT THE FORD

"THEY will allow two nuns to pass anywhere," said Sor Teresa with her chilling smile as she led the way to her own cell in the corridor overhead. She provided Juanita with that dress which is a passport through any quarter of a town, across any frontier; to any battle-field. So Juanita took the veil at last—in order to return to Marcos.

Sor Teresa's words proved true enough at the city gates where the sentinels recognised her and allowed her carriage to pass across the drawbridge by a careless nod of acquiescence to the driver.

It was a clear dark night without a moon. The prevailing wind which hurries down from the Pyrenees to the warmer plains of Spain stirred the budding leaves of the trees that border the road below the town walls.

"I suppose," said Sor Teresa suddenly, "that Evasio Mon was at Torre Garda to-day."

"Yes."

"And you left him there when you came away."

"Yes."

"We shall meet him on the road," said Sor Teresa with a note of anxiety in her voice. Presently she stood up in the carriage which was an open one on high

wheels and spoke to the driver in a low voice into his ear. He was a stout and respectable man with a good ecclesiastical clientèle in the pious capital of Navarre. He had a confidential manner.

The distant firing had ceased now and a great stillness reigned over the bare land. There are no trees here to harbour birds or to rustle in the wind. The man, nursing his horses for the long journey, drove at an easy pace. Juanita, usually voluble enough, seemed to have nothing to say to Sor Teresa. The driver could possibly overhear the conversation of his passengers. For this, or for another reason, Sor Teresa was silent.

As they approached the hills, they found themselves in a more broken country. They climbed and descended with a rather irritating regularity. The spurs of the Pyrenees keep their form right down to the plains and the road to Torre Garda passes over them. Juanita leant sideways out of the carriage and stared upwards into the pine trees.

"Do you see anything?" asked Sor Teresa.

"No—I can see nothing."

"There is a chapel up there, on the slope."

"Our Lady of the Shadows," answered Juanita and lapsed into silence again. She knew now why the name had struck her with such foreboding, when she had learnt it from the lips of the laughing young captain of infantry.

It told of calamity—the greatest that can happen to a woman—to be married without love.

The driver turned in his seat and tried to overhear. He seemed uneasy and looked about him with quick

turns of the head. At last, when his horses were mounting a hill, he turned round.

"Did these sainted ladies hear anything?" he asked.

"No," answered Sor Teresa. "Why do you ask?"

"There has been a man on horseback on the road behind us," he answered with assumed carelessness, "all the way from Pampeluna. He has now taken a short cut and is in front on the road above us; I can hear him; that is all."

And he gave a little cry to his horses; the signal for them to trot. They were approaching the mouth of the Valley of the Wolf, and could hear the sound of its wild waters in the darkness below them. The valley opens out like a fan with either slope rising at an easy angle to the pine woods. The road is a cornice cut on the western bank upon which side it runs for ten miles until the bridge below the village of Torre Garda leads it across the river to the sunny slope where the village crouches below the ancient castle from which the name is taken.

The horses were going at a walking pace now, and the driver to show, perhaps, his nonchalance and fearlessness was humming a song beneath his breath, when suddenly the hillside burst into flame and a deafening roar of musketry stunned both horses and driver. Juanita happened to be looking up at the hillside and she saw the fire run along like a snake of flame in the grass. In a moment the carriage had swung round and the horses were going at a gallop down the hill again. The driver stood up. He had a rein in either hand and he hauled the horses round each successive corner with consum-

mate skill. All the while he used language which would have huddled Cousin Peligros shrieking in the bottom of the carriage.

Juanita and Sor Teresa stood up and looked back. By the light of the firing they saw a man lying low on his horse's neck galloping headlong through the zone of death after them.

"Did you hear the bullets?" said Juanita breathlessly. "They were like the wind through the telegraph-wires. Oh, I should like to be a man; I should like to be a soldier!"

And she gave a low laugh of thrilling excitement.

The driver was now pulling up his horses. He too laughed aloud.

"It is the troops," he cried. "They thought we were the Carlists. But, who is this, Señoras? It is that man again."

He leant back and hastily twisted one of the carriage-lamps round in its socket so as to show a light behind him towards the newcomer.

As the rider pulled up he came within the rays of the lamp which was a powerful one; and at the sight of him Juanita gave a sharp cry which neither she nor any that heard it forgot to the end of their lives.

"It is Marcos," she cried, clutching Sor Teresa's arm. "And he came through that—he came through that!"

"No one hurt?" asked Marcos' deep voice.

"No one hurt, Señor," answered the driver who had recognised him.

"And the horses?"

"The horses are safe. A malediction upon them; they nearly had us over the cliff. Those are the troops. They took us for Carlists."

"No," said Marcos. "They are the Carlists. The troops have been driven farther up the valley where they are entrenched. They have sent to Pampeluna for help. This is a Carlist trap to catch the reinforcements as they approach. They thought your carriage was a gun."

The driver scratched his head and made known his views as to the ancestory of the Carlists.

"There is no getting into the valley to-night," said Marcos to Sor Teresa and Juanita. "You must return to Pampeluna."

"And what will you do?" asked Juanita in a hard voice.

"I will go on to Torre Garda on foot," answered Marcos speaking in French so that the driver should not hear and understand. "There is a way over the mountains which is known to two or three only."

"Uncle Ramon is at Torre Garda?" asked Juanita in the same curt, quick way.

"Yes."

"Then I will go with you," she said with her hand already on the door.

"It is sixteen miles," said Marcos, "over the high mountains. The last part can only be done by daylight. I shall be in the mountains all night."

Juanita had opened the door. She stood on the step looking up at him as he sat on the tall black horse.

"If you will take me," she said in French, "I will come with you."

Sor Teresa was silent still. She had not spoken since

Marcos had pulled up his sweating horse in the lamp-light. What a simple world this would be if more of its women knew when to hold their tongues!

Marcos, fresh from a bed of sickness was not fit to undertake this journey. He must already be tired out; for she knew that it was Marcos who had followed their carriage from Pampeluna. She guessed that finding no troops where he expected to find them he had ridden ahead to discover the cause of it and had passed unheard through the Carlist ambush and back again through the zone of fire. That Juanita could accomplish the journey on foot to Torre Garda seemed doubtful. The country was unsafe; the snows had hardly melted. It was madness for a wounded man and a girl to attempt to reach Torre Garda through a pass held by the enemy. But Sor Teresa said nothing.

Marcos sat motionless in the saddle. His face was above the radius of the reversed carriage-lamp, while Juanita standing on the dusty road in her nun's dress looking up at him, was close to the glaring light. It is to be presumed that he was watching her descend from the carriage and then turn to shut the door on Sor Teresa. By his silence, Marcos seemed to consent to this arrangement.

He came forward into the light now. In his hand he held a paper which he was unfolding. Juanita recognised the letter she had written to him in the drawing-room at Torre Garda. He tore the blank sheet off and folding the letter closely, replaced it in his pocket. Then he laid the blank sheet on the dusty splash-board of the carriage and wrote a few words in pencil.

"You must get back to Pampeluna," he said to the driver in that tone of command which is the only survival of feudal days now left in Europe—and even the modern Spaniards are losing it—"at any cost—you understand. If you meet the reinforcements on the road give this note to the commanding officer. Take no denial; give it into his own hand. If you meet no troops go straight to the house of the commandant at Pampeluna and give the letter to him. You will see that it is done," he said in a lower voice, turning to Sor Teresa.

The man protested that nothing short of death would prevent his carrying out the instructions.

"It will be worth your while," said Marcos. "It will be remembered afterwards."

He paused deep in thought. There were a hundred things to be considered at that moment; quickly and carefully. For he was going into the Valley of the Wolf, cut off from all the world by two armies watching each other with a deadly hatred.

The quiet voice of Sor Teresa broke the silence, softly taking its place in his thoughts. It seemed that the Sarrion brain had the power—the secret of so much success in this world—of thrusting forth a sure and steady hand to grasp the heart of a question and tear it from the tangle of side-issues among which the majority of men and women are condemned to flounder.

"Where is Evasio Mon?" she asked.

Marcos answered with a low, contented laugh.

"He is trapped in the valley," he said in French. "I have seen to that."

The firing had ceased as suddenly as it had commenced,

and a silence only broken by the voice of the river, now hung over the valley.

"Are you ready?" Sor Teresa asked her driver.

"Yes, Excellency."

"Then go."

She may have nodded a farewell to Marcos and Juanita. But that they could not see in the blackness of the night. She certainly gave them no spoken salutation. The carriage moved away at a sharp trot, leaving Marcos and Juanita alone.

"We can ride some distance and must ford the river higher up," said Marcos at once. He did not seem to want any explanation. The excitement of the moment seemed to have wiped out the events of the last few months like writing off a slate. Juanita was young again, ready to throw herself headlong into an adventure in the mountains with Marcos such as they had had together many times during the holidays. But this was better than the dangers of mere snow and ice. For Juanita had tasted that highest of emotions, the excitement of battle. She had heard that which some men having once heard cannot live without, the siren song of a bullet.

"Are we going nearer to the Carlists?" she asked hurriedly. There was fighting blood in her veins, and the tones of her voice told clearly enough that it was astir at this moment.

"Yes," answered Marcos. "We must pass underneath them; for the ford is there. We must be quite noiseless. We must not even whisper."

He edged his horse towards one of the rough stones

laid on the outer edge of the road to mark its limit at night.

"I can only give you one hand," he said. "Can you get up from this stone?"

"Behind you?" asked Juanita; "as we used to ride when I was—little?"

For Marcos had, like most Spaniards, grown from boyhood to manhood in the saddle, and Juanita had no fear of horses. She clambered to the broad back of the Moor and settled herself there, sitting pillion fashion and holding herself in position with both hands round Marcos.

"If he trots, I fall off," she said, with an eager laugh.

They soon quitted the road and began to descend the steep slope towards the river by a narrow path only made visible by the open space in the high brushwood. It was the way down to a ford leading to a cottage by courtesy called a farm, though the cultivated land was scarcely an acre in extent, reclaimed from the river-bed.

The ground was soft and mossy and the roar of the river covered the tread of the careful horse. In a few minutes they reached the water's edge, and after a moment's hesitation the Moor stepped boldly in. On the other bank Marcos whispered to Juanita to drop to the ground.

"The cottage is here," he said. "I shall leave the horse in their shed."

He descended from the saddle and they stood for a moment side by side.

"Let us wait a few moments, the moon is rising," said Marcos. "Perhaps the Carlists have been here."

As he spoke the sky grew lighter. In a minute or two a waning moon looked out over the sharp outline of hill and flooded the valley with a reddish light.

"It is all right," he said; "nothing is disturbed here. They are asleep in the cottage; the noise of the river must have drowned the firing. They are friends of mine; they will give us some food for to-morrow morning and another dress for you. You cannot go in that."

"Oh!" laughed Juanita, "I have taken the veil. It is done now and cannot be undone."

She raised her hands to the wings of her spreading cap as if to defend it against all comers. And Marcos, turning, suddenly threw his uninjured arm round her, imprisoning her struggling arms. He held her thus a prisoner while with his injured hand he found the strings of the cap. In a moment the starched linen fluttered out, fell into the river, and was carried swirling away.

Juanita was still laughing, but Marcos did not answer to her gaiety. She recollected at that instant having once threatened to dress as a nun in order to alarm Marcos, and Sarrion's grave remark that it would of a certainty frighten him.

They were silent for a moment. Then Juanita spoke with a sort of forced lightness.

"You may have only one arm," she said, "but it is an astonishingly strong one!"

And she looked at him surreptitiously beneath her lashes as she stood with her hands on her hair.

CHAPTER XXVII

IN THE CLOUDS

MARCOS tied his horse to a tree and led the way towards the cottage. It seemed to be innocent of bars and bolts. The ford, known to so few, and the evil name of the Wolf, served instead. The door opened at a push, and Marcos went in. A wood-fire smouldered on an open hearth, while the acrid smoke half-filled the room, blackened by the fumes of peat and charcoal.

Marcos stood on the threshold and called the owner by name. There was a shuffling sound in an inner room and the scraping of a match. A minute later a door was opened and an old woman stood in the aperture, fully dressed and carrying a lamp above her head.

"Ah!" she said. "It is you. I thought it was the voice of a friend. And you have your pretty wife there. What are you doing abroad at this hour . . . the Carlists?"

"Yes," answered Marcos, rather quickly, "the Carlists. We cannot pass by the road, so have sent the carriage back and are going across the mountains."

The woman held up her hands and shook them from side to side in a gesture of horror.

"Ah! but there!" she cried, "I know what you are. There is no turning your back on your road. If you say you will go—you will go though it rain rocks. But

this child—ah, dear, dear! You do not know what you have married—with your bright eyes. Sit down, my child. I will get you what I can. Some coffee. I am alone in the house. All my men have gone to the high valley, now that the snow is gone, to collect wood and to see what the winter has done for our hut up in the mountain."

Marcos thanked her, and explained that they wanted nothing but a roof under which to leave his horse.

"We are going up to the higher valley to-night," he said, "where we shall find your husband and sons. And at daylight we must hurry on to Torre Garda. But I want to borrow a dress and handkerchief belonging to one of your daughters. See, the Señora cannot walk in that one, which is too fine and too long."

"Oh, but my daughters . . ." exclaimed the old woman, with deprecating hands.

"They are very pretty girls," answered Marcos, with a laugh. "All the valley knows that."

"They are not bad," admitted the mother, "but it is a flower compared to a cabbage. Still, we can hide the flower in the cabbage leaves if you like."

And she laughed heartily at her own conceit.

"Then see to it while I put my horse away," said Marcos. He quitted the hut and overheard the woman pointing out to Juanita that she had lost her mantilla coming through the trees in the dark. While he attended to his horse he could hear their laughter and gay conversation over the change of clothes; for Juanita understood these people as well as he did, and had grown through childhood to the age of thought in their midst.

The peasant was still pressing a simple hospitality upon Juanita when Marcos returned to the cottage and found her ready for the journey.

"I was telling the Señora," explained the woman volubly, "that she must not so much as look inside the cottage in the mountains. I have not been there for six months and the men—you know what they are. They are no better than dogs I tell them. There is plenty of clean hay and dry bracken in the sheds up there and you can well make a soft bed for her to get some sleep for a few hours. And here I have unfolded a new blanket for the lady. See, it is white as I bought it. She can use it. It has never been worn—by us others," she added with perfect simplicity.

Marcos took the blanket while Juanita explained that having slept soundly every night of her life without exception, she could well now accommodate herself with a rest of two hours in the hay. The woman pressed upon them some of her small store of coffee and some new bread.

"He can well prepare your breakfast for you," she said, confidentially to Juanita. "He is like one of us. All the valley will tell you that. A great gentleman who can yet cook his own breakfast—as the good God meant them to be."

They set forth at once in the yellow light of the waning moon, Marcos leading the way up a pathway hardly discernible amid the rocks and undergrowth. Once or twice he turned to help Juanita over a hard or a dangerous place. But they did not talk, as conversation was not only difficult but inexpedient.

They had climbed for two hours, slowly and steadily, when the barking of a dog on the mountainside above them notified them that they were nearing their destination.

"Who is it?" asked a voice presently.

"Marcos de Sarrion," replied Marcos. "Strike no lights."

"We have no candles up here," answered the man with a laugh. He only spoke Basque and it was in this language that Marcos gave a brief explanation. Juanita sat on a rock. She was tired out. There were three men—short, thick-set and silent, a father and two sons. They stood in front of Marcos and spoke in monosyllables after the manner of old friends. Under his directions they brought a heap of dried bracken and hay. In a shed, little more than a roof and four uprights, they made a rough couch for Juanita which they hedged round with heaps of bracken to protect her from the wind.

"You will see the stars," said the old man shaking out the blanket which Marcos had carried up from the cottage at the ford. "It is good to see the stars when you awake in the night. One remembers that the saints are watching."

In a few minutes Juanita was sleeping, like a child, curled up beneath her blanket, and heard through her dreams the low voices of Marcos and the peasants talking hurriedly in the half-ruined cottage. For Marcos and these three were the only men who knew the way over the mountains to Torre Garda.

The dawn was just breaking when Marcos awoke Juanita.

"Oh," she said plaintively. "I have only been asleep ten minutes."

"You have slept three hours," replied Marcos in that hushed voice in which it seems natural to speak before the dawn. "I am making coffee—come when you are ready."

Juanita found a pail of water and a piece of last year's yellow soap which had been carefully scraped clean with a knife. A clean towel had also been provided. Juanita noted the manly simplicity of these attentions with a little tender and wise smile.

"I know what it is that makes men gipsies," she said, when she joined Marcos who was attending to a fire of sticks on the ground at the cottage door. "I shall always have a kindly feeling for them now. They get something straight from heaven which is never known to people who sleep in stuffy houses and get up to wash in warm water."

She gave a little shiver at the recollection of her ablutions, and laughed a clear, low laugh, as fresh as the morning itself.

"Where are the men?" she asked.

"One has gone to Pampeluna, one has taken a note to the officer commanding the reinforcements sent for by Zeneta. The third has gone down to fetch his mother up here to bake bread all day. There will be a little army here to-night."

Juanita stood watching Marcos who seemed entirely absorbed in blowing up the fire with a pair of dilapidated bellows.

"I suppose," she said lightly, "that it was of these

things that you were thinking when you were so silent as we climbed up here last night."

"I suppose so," answered Marcos.

Juanita looked at him with a little frown as if she did not quite believe him. The day had now come and a pink light suffused the topmost peaks. A faint warmth spread itself like a caress across the valley and turned the cold air into a pearly mist.

"Of what are you thinking?" asked Marcos suddenly; for Juanita had stood motionless, watching him.

"I was thinking what a comfort it is that you are not an indoor man," she replied with a careless laugh.

The peasants had brought their cows to the high pastures. So there was plenty of milk in the cottage which was little more than a dairy; for it had no furniture beyond a few straw mattresses thrown on the floor in one corner. Marcos served breakfast.

"Pedro particularly told me to see that you had the cup which has a handle," he said, pouring the coffee from a battered coffee-pot. During their simple breakfast they were silent. There was a subtle constraint. Juanita who had a quick and direct mind, decided that the moment had come for that explanation for which Marcos did not ask. An explanation does not improve by keeping. They were alone here—alone in the world it seemed—for the cows had strayed away. The dogs had gone to the valley with their masters. She and Marcos had always known each other. She knew his every thought; she was not afraid of him; she never had been. Why should she be now?

"Marcos," she said.

"Yes."

"I want you to give me the letter I wrote to you at Torre Garda."

He felt in his pocket and handed her the first paper he found without particularly looking at it. Juanita unfolded it. It was the note, all crumpled, which she had thrust through the wall of the convent school at Saragossa. She had forgotten it, but Marcos had kept it all this time.

"That is the wrong one," she said gravely, and handed it back to Marcos, who took it with a little jerk of the head as of annoyance at his own stupidity. He was usually very accurate in details. He gave her in exchange the right paper, which had been torn in two. The other half is in the military despatch office in Madrid to-day. Juanita had arranged in her own mind what to say. She was quite mistress of the situation, and was ready to move serenely and surely in her own sphere, taking the lead in such subtle matters with the capability and mastery which characterised Marcos' lead in affairs of action. But Marcos' mistake seemed to have put out her prearranged scheme.

She slowly tore the letter into pieces and threw it on the fire.

"Do you know why I came back?" she asked, which question can hardly have formed part of the plan of action.

"No."

"Because you never pretended that you cared. If you had pretended that you cared for me, I should never have forgiven you."

Marcos did not answer. He looked up slowly, expecting perhaps to find her looking elsewhere. But her eyes met his and she shrank back with an involuntary movement that seemed to be of fear. Her face flushed all over and then the colour faded from it, leaving her white and motionless as she sat staring into the flickering wood-fire.

Presently she rose and walked to the edge of the plateau upon which the hut was built. She stood there looking across to the mountains.

Marcos busied himself with the simple possessions of his host, setting them in order where he had found them and treading out the smouldering embers of the fire. Juanita turned and watched him over her shoulder with a mystic persistency. Beneath her lashes lurked a smile —triumphant and tender.

CHAPTER XXVIII

LE GANT DE VELOURS

THEY accomplished the rest of the journey without accident. The old spirit of adventure which had led them to these mountains while they were yet children seemed to awaken again, and they were as comrades. But Juanita was absent-minded. She was not climbing skilfully. At one place far above trees or other vegetation she made a false step and sent a great rock rolling down the slope.

"You must be careful," said Marcos, almost sharply. "You are not thinking what you are doing."

And Juanita suffered the reproof with an unwonted meekness. She was more careful while they passed over a dangerous slope where the snow had softened in the morning sun, and came to the topmost valley—an oval basin of rocks and snow with no visible outlet. Immediately below them, at the foot of a slope, which looked quite feasible, lay huddled the body of a man.

"It is a Carlist," explained Marcos. "We heard some time ago that they had been trying to find another way over to Torre Garda. That valley is a trap. That is not the way to Torre Garda at all; and that slope is solid ice. See, his knife lies beside him. He tried to cut steps before he died. This is our way."

And he led Juanita rather hastily away.

At nine o'clock they passed the last shoulder and stood above Torre Garda, and the valley of the Wolf lying in the sunlight below them. The road down the valley lay like a yellow ribbon stretched across the broad breast of Nature.

Half an hour later they reached the pine woods, and heard Perro barking on the terrace. The dog soon came panting to meet them, and not far behind him Sarrion, whose face betrayed no surprise at perceiving Juanita.

"You would have been safer at Pampeluna," he said with a keen glance into her face.

"I am quite safe enough here, thank you," she answered, meeting his eyes with a steady smile.

He asked Marcos whether he had felt his wounded shoulder or suffered from so much exertion. And Juanita answered more fully than Marcos, giving details which she had certainly not learnt from himself. A man having once been nursed in sickness by a woman parts with some portion of his personal liberty which she never relinquishes.

"It is the result of good nursing," said Sarrion, slipping his hand inside Juanita's arm and walking by her side.

"It is the result of his great strength," she answered, with a glance towards Marcos, which he did not perceive, for he was looking straight in front of him.

"Uncle Ramon," said Juanita, an hour later when they were sitting on the terrace together. She turned towards him suddenly with her shrewd little smile. "Uncle Ramon—do you ever play Pelota?"

"Every Basque plays Pelota," he replied.

Juanita nodded and lapsed into reflective silence. She seemed to be arranging something in her mind. Towards Sarrion, as towards Marcos, she assumed at times an attitude of protection, and almost of patronage, as if she knew much that was hidden from them and had access to some chamber of life of which the door was closed to all men.

"Does it ever strike you," she said at length, "that in a game of Pelota—supposing the ball to be endowed with a . . . well a certain lower form of intelligence, the intelligence of a mere woman, for instance—it would be rather natural for it to wonder what on earth the game was about? It might even think that it had a certain right to know what was happening to it."

"Yes," admitted Sarrion, who having a quick and eager mind, understood that Juanita was preparing to speak plainly. And at such times women always speak more plainly than men. He lighted a cigarette, threw away the match with a little gesture which seemed to indicate that he was ready for her—would meet her on her own ground.

"Why did Evasio Mon want me to go into religion?" she asked bluntly.

"My child—you have three million pesetas."

"And if I had gone into religion—and I nearly did—the Church would have had them?"

"Pardon me," said Sarrion. "The Jesuits—not the Church. It is not the same thing—though the world does not yet understand that. The Jesuits would have had the money and they would have spent it in throwing Spain into another civil war which would have been

a worse war than we have seen. The Church—our Church—has enemies. It has Bismarck, and the English; but it has no worse enemy than the Jesuits. For they play their own game."

"At Pelota! and you and Marcos?"

"We were on the other side," said Sarrion, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"And I have been the ball."

Sarrion glanced at her sideways. This was the moment that Marcos had always anticipated. Sarrion wondered why he should have to meet it and not Marcos. Juanita sat motionless with steady eyes fixed on the distant mountains. He looked at her lips and saw there a faint smile not devoid of pity—as if she knew something of which he was ignorant. He pulled himself together; for he was a bold man who faced his fences with a smile.

"Well," he said, ". . . since we have won."

"Have you won?"

Sarrion glanced at her again. Why did she not speak plainly, he was wondering. In the subtler matters of life, women have a clearer comprehension and a plainer speech than men. When they are tongue-tied—the reason is a strong one.

"At all events Señor Mon does not know when he is beaten," said Juanita, and the silence that followed was broken by the distant sound of firing. They were fighting at the mouth of the valley.

"That is true," admitted Sarrion.

"They say he is trapped in the valley—as we are."

"So I believe."

"Will he come to Torre Garda?"

"As likely as not," answered Sarrion. "He has never lacked audacity."

"If he comes I should like to speak to him," said Juanita.

Sarrion wondered whether she intended to make Evasio Mon understand that he was beaten. It was Mon himself who had said that the woman always holds the casting vote.

"At all events," said Juanita, who seemed to have returned in her thoughts to the question of winning or losing. "At all events, you played a bold game."

"That is why we won," said Sarrion, stoutly.

"And you did not heed the risks."

"What risks?"

Juanita turned and looked at him with a little laugh of scorn.

"Oh, you do not understand. Neither does Marcos. I suppose men don't. You might have ruined several lives."

"So might Evasio Mon," returned Sarrion sharply. And Juanita rather drew back as a fencer may flinch who has been touched.

Sarrion leant back in his chair and threw away the cigarette which he had not smoked. Juanita had chosen her own ground and he had met her on it. He had answered the question which she was too proud to ask.

And as he had anticipated, Evasio Mon came to Torre Garda. It was almost dusk when he arrived. Whether he knew that Marcos was not in his room, remained an open question. He did not ask after him. He was

brought by the servant to the terrace where he found Cousin Peligros and Juanita. Sarrion was in his study and came out when Mon passed the open window.

"So we are all besieged," said the visitor, with his tolerant smile as he took a chair offered to him in the grand manner by Cousin Peligros, who belonged to the school of etiquette that holds it wrong for any lady to be natural in the presence of men other than of her own family.

Cousin Peligros smiled in rather a pinched way, and with a gesture of her outspread hands morally wiped the besiegers out. No female Sarrion, she seemed to imply, need ever fear inconvenience from a person in uniform.

"You and I, Señorita," said Mon, with his bland and easy sympathy of manner, "have no business here. We are persons of peace."

Cousin Peligros made a condescending and yet decisive gesture, patting the empty air.

"I have my charge. I shall fulfil it," she said—determined, and not without a suggestion of coyness withal.

Juanita was lying in wait for a glance from Sarrion and when she received it she made a little movement of the eyelids, telling him to take Cousin Peligros away.

"You will stay the night," said Sarrion to Evasio Mon.

"No, my friend. Thank you very much. I cherish a hope of getting through the lines to-night to Pampeluna. I came indeed to offer my poor services as escort to these ladies who will surely be safer at Pampeluna."

"Then you think that they will besiege Torre Garda," asked Sarrion, innocently.

"One never knows, my friend—one never knows. It seems to me that the firing is nearer this afternoon."

Sarrion laughed.

"You are always hearing guns."

Mon turned and looked at him and there was a suggestion of melancholy in his smile.

"Ah! Ramon," he said. "You and I have heard them all our lives."

And there was perhaps a second meaning in his words, known only to Sarrion, whose face softened for an instant.

"Let us have some coffee," he said, turning to Cousin Peligros. "Will you see to it, Peligros—in the library?"

So Peligros walked across the broad terrace with the mincing steps taught in the thirties, leaving Mon hatless with a bowed head according to the etiquette of those leisurely days. He was all things, to all men.

"By the way . . ." said Sarrion, and followed her without completing his sentence.

So Juanita and Evasio Mon were left alone on the terrace. Juanita was sitting rather upright in a garden chair. The only seat near to her was the easy chair just vacated by Cousin Peligros. Mon looked at it. He glanced at Juanita and then drew it forward. She turned, and with a smile and gesture invited him to be seated. A watchful look came into Evasio Mon's quick eyes behind the glasses that reflected the last rays of the setting sun. For the young and the guilty, silence has a special terror. Mon had dealt with the young and the guilty all his life. He sat down without speaking. He

was waiting for Juanita. Juanita moved her toe within her neat black slipper, looking at it critically. She was waiting for Evasio Mon. He paused as a duellist may pause with his best weapons laid out on the table before him, wondering which one to select. Perhaps he suspected that Juanita held the keenest; that deadly plain-speaking.

His subtle training had taught him to sink self so completely that it was easy to him to insinuate his mind into the thoughts of another; to understand them, almost to sympathise with them. But Juanita puzzled him. There is no face so baffling as that which a woman shows the world when she is hiding her heart.

"I spoke as a friend," said Mon, "when I recommended you to allow me to escort you to Pampeluna."

"I know that you always speak as a friend," answered Juanita quietly ". . . of mine. Not of Marcos, perhaps."

"Ah, but your friends are Marcos'," said Mon, with a suggestion of raillery in his voice.

"And his enemies are mine," she retorted, looking straight in front of her.

"Of course—is it not written in the marriage service?" Mon laughingly turned in his chair and cast a glance up at the windows as he spoke. They were beyond earshot of the house. "But why should I be an enemy of Marcos de Sarrion?"

Then Juanita unmasked her guns.

"Because he outwitted you and married me," she answered.

"For your money ——"

"Yes, for my money. He was quite honest about it, I assure you. He told me that it was a matter of business —of politics. That was the word he used."

"He told you that?" asked Mon in real surprise.

Juanita nodded her head. She was looking at her own slipper again and the moving foot within it. There was a mystic little smile at the corner of her lips which tilted upwards there, as humorous and tender lips nearly always do. It suggested that she knew something which even Evasio Mon, the all-wise, did not know.

"And you believed him?" inquired Mon, dimly groping at the meaning of the smile.

"He told me that it was the only way of escaping you . . . and the rest of them . . . and Religion," answered Juanita—without answering the question.

"And you believed him?" repeated Mon, which was a mistake; for she turned on him at once and answered, "Yes."

Mon shrugged his shoulders with the tolerant air of one who has met defeat time after time; who expected naught else perhaps.

"Then there is nothing more to be said," he observed carelessly. "You elect to remain at Torre Garda. I bow to your decision, my child. I have warned you."

"Against Marcos?"

Mon shrugged his shoulders a second time.

"And in reply to your warning," said Juanita slowly. "I will tell you that Marcos has never done or said anything unworthy of a Spanish gentleman—and there is no better gentleman in the world."

Which statement all men will assuredly be ready to admit.

Mon turned and looked at her with an odd smile.

"Ah!" he said. "You have fallen in love with Marcos."

Juanita changed colour and her eyes suddenly lighted with anger.

"I am not afraid of anything you may say or do," she said. "I have Marcos. Marcos has always outwitted you when you have come in contact with him. Marcos is cleverer than you. He is stronger."

She paused. Mon was slowly drawing his gloves through his hands which were white and smooth.

"That is the difference between you," she continued. "You wear gloves. Marcos takes hold of life with his bare hand. You may be more cunning, but Marcos outwits you. The mind seeks but the heart finds. Your mind may be subtle—but Marcos has a better heart."

Mon had risen. He stood with his face half turned away from her so that she could only see his profile. And for a moment she was sorry for him; that one moment which always mars an earthly victory.

He turned away from her and walked slowly towards the library window which stood open and gave passage to the sound of moving cups and saucers. We all carry with us through life the remembrance of certain words probably forgotten by the speaker. A few bear the keener, sharper memory of words unspoken. Juanita never forgot the silence of Evasio Mon as he walked away from her.

A moment later she heard him laughing and talking in the library.

He had come on horseback and Sarrion accompanied him to the stables on his departure. They were both young for their years. The Spaniards of the north are thin and lithe and long-lived. Sarrion offered his hand for Mon's knee, who with this aid sprang into the saddle.

He turned and looked towards the terrace.

"Juanita," he said, and paused. "She is no longer a child. One hopes that she may have a happy life . . . seeing that so many do not."

Sarrion made no answer.

"We are not weaklings," continued Mon lightly. "You, and Marcos and I. We may sweat and toil as we will—but believe me, there is more power in Juanita's little finger. It is the casting vote—amigo—the casting vote."

He waved a salutation as he rode away.

CHAPTER XXIX

LA MAIN DE FER

JUANITA was very early astir the next morning. The house was peculiarly quiet, but she knew that Marcos, if he had been abroad, had now returned; for Perro was lying on the terrace in the sunlight watching the library window.

Juanita went to that room and there found Marcos writing letters. A map of the Valley of the Wolf lay open on the table beside him.

"You are always writing letters," she said. "You began writing them on the splash-board of the carriage at the mouth of the valley and you have been doing it ever since."

"They are making use of my knowledge of the valley," he replied. He continued his task after a very quick glance up at her. Juanita had found out that he rarely looked at her.

"I am not at all tired after our adventure," she said. "I made up last night for the want of sleep. Do I look tired?"

"Not at all," answered Marcos, glancing no higher than her waist.

"But I had a dream," she said. "It was so vivid that I am not sure now that it was a dream. I am not sure

that I did not in reality get out of bed quite early in the morning, before daylight, when the moon was just touching the mountains, and look out of my window. And the terrace, Marcos, was covered with soldiers; rows and rows of them, like shadows. And at the end, beneath my window, stood a group of men. Some were officers; one looked like General Pacheco, fat with a chuckling laugh; another seemed to be Captain Zeneta—the friend who stood by us in the chapel of Our Lady of the Shadows—who was saying his prayers, you remember. Most young men are too conceited to say their prayers nowadays. And there were two civilians, in riding-boots all dusty, who looked singularly like you and Uncle Ramon. It was an odd dream, Marcos—was it not?"

"Yes," answered he with a laugh. "Do not tell it to the wrong people as Joseph did."

"No, your reverence," she said. She stood looking at him with grave eyes.

"Is there going to be a battle?" she asked, curtly.

"Yes."

"Where?"

He pointed down into the valley with his pen.

"Just above the bridge if it all comes off as they have planned."

She went out on to the terrace and looked down into the valley, which was peaceful enough in the morning light. The thin smoke of the pine wood-fires rose from the chimneys in columns of brilliant blue. The sheep on the slopes across the valley were calling to their lambs. Then Juanita returned to the library window and stood

on the threshold, with brooding eyes and a bright patch of colour in her cheeks.

"Will you do me a favour?" she asked.

"Of course."

He lifted his pen from the paper, but did not look up.

"If there is a battle—if there is any fighting, will you take great care of yourself? It would be so terrible if anything happened to you . . . for Uncle Ramon I mean."

"Yes," answered Marcos, gravely. "I understand. I promise to take care."

Juanita still lingered at the window.

"And you always keep your promises, don't you? To the letter?"

"Why shouldn't I?"

"No, of course not. It is characteristic of you, that is all. Your promise is a sort of rock that nothing can move. Women, you know, make a promise and then ask to be let off; you would not do that?"

"No," answered Marcos, quite simply.

In Navarre the hours of meals are much the same as those that rule in England to-day. At one o'clock luncheon both Marcos and Sarrion were at home. The valley seemed quiet enough. The soldiers of Juanita's dream seemed to have vanished like the shadows to which she compared them.

"I am sure," said Cousin Peligros, while they were still at the table, "that the sound of firing approaches. I have a very delicate hearing. All my senses are very highly developed. The sound of the firing is nearer, Marcos."

"Zeneta is retreating slowly before the enemy, with his small force," explained Marcos.

"But why is he doing that? He must surely know that there are ladies at Torre Garda."

"Ladies are not articles of war," said Juanita with a frivolous disregard of Cousin Peligros' reproving face. "And this is war."

As she spoke Marcos rose and quitted the room after glancing at his watch. Juanita followed him.

"Marcos," she said, in the hall, having closed the dining-room door behind her. "Will you tell me what time it will begin?"

"Zeneta is timed to retreat across the bridge at three o'clock. The enemy will, it is hoped, follow him."

"And where will you be?"

"I shall be with Pacheco and his staff on the hill behind Pedro's mill. You will see a little flag wherever Pacheco is."

Cousin Peligros' delicate hearing had not been deceived. The firing was now close at hand. The valley takes a turn to the left below the ridge and upon the hillside above this corner the white irregular line of smoke now became visible.

In a few minutes the dark mass of Zeneta's men appeared on the road at the corner. He was before his time. The men were running. They raised the dust like a troop of sheep and moved in a halo of it. Every hundred yards they stopped and fired a volley. They were acting with perfect regularity and from a distance looked like toy soldiers. They were retreating in good order and the sound of their volleys came at regular in-

tervals. On the bridge they halted. They were going to make a stand here, as would seem natural. Had they had artillery they could have effectually held this strong and narrow place.

It now became apparent that they were a woefully small detachment. They could not spare men to take up positions on the rocky hillside behind them.

There was a pause. The Carlists were waiting for their skirmishers to come in from heights above the road.

Sarrion and Juanita stood at the edge of the terrace. Sarrion was watching with a quick and comprehensive glance.

"Is General Pacheco a good general?" asked Juanita.

"Excellent."

Sarrion did not comment further on this successful soldier.

"They played me false," the General had told him indignantly a few hours earlier. "They promised me a good sum—yes a sufficient sum. But when the time came the money was not forthcoming. An awkward position; but I found a way out of it."

"By being loyal," suggested Sarrion with a short laugh and there the conversation ceased.

Juanita looked across the valley towards Pedro's mill. There was no flag there. All the valley was peaceful enough, giving in the brilliant sunshine no glint of sword or bayonet.

On the bridge, the little knot of men awaited the advent of the Carlists forming up round the corner. In a moment these came, swarming over the road and the

hillside. The roadway was packed with them, the rocks and the bushes above the river seemed alive with them. They fired independently, and the hillside was white in a moment. The royalist troops on the bridge fired one volley and then turned. They ran straight along the road. Some threw down their knapsacks. One or two stopped, seemed to hesitate and then laid them down on the road like a tired child. Others limped to the side and sat there.

All the while the Carlists came on. The rear ranks were still coming round the corner. The skirmishers were already across the bridge. There was only one place for Zeneta's men to run to now—the castle of Torre Garda. They were already at the foot of the slope. Juanita and Sarrion could distinguish the slim form of their commander walking along the road behind his men, sword in hand. Sometimes he ran a few steps, but for the most part he walked with long, steady strides, shepherding his men.

They began to climb the slope, and Zeneta took up his position on a rock jutting out of the hillside. He stood on tiptoe and watched the bridge. The last of the Carlists were on it now. Juanita could see his eager face, with intrepid eyes alert, and lips apart, drawn back over his teeth. She glanced at Sarrion, whose lips were the same. His eyes glittered. He was biting his lower lip.

As the last man ran across the bridge on the heels of his comrades, Zeneta looked across the valley towards the water mill. He waved his handkerchief high above his head. A little flag fluttered above the trees growing round the mill-wheel.

Cousin Peligros being only human now came to the terrace to see what was happening. She had taken the precaution of putting on her mittens and opening her parasol.

"What is the meaning of this noise?" she asked; but neither Sarrion nor Juanita seemed to hear her. They were watching the little flag, which seemed to be descending the hill.

So close beneath the house were Zeneta's men now, that those on the terrace could hear his voice.

"The bridge," said Sarrion, under his breath. "Look at the bridge!"

It was half hidden in the smoke that still hovered in the air, but something was taking place there. Men were running hither and thither. The sunlight glittered on uniform and bayonet.

"Guns!" said Sarrion curtly, and as he spoke the whole valley shook beneath their feet. A roar seemed to arise from the river and spread all up the hills, and simultaneously a cloak of white smoke was laid over the green slopes.

Juanita saw Zeneta stand for a moment, with sword upheld, while his men gathered round him. Then with a wild shout of exultation he led them down the hill again. Before he had run ten paces he fell—his feet seemed to slip from under him, and he lay at full length for a moment—then he was up again and at the head of his men.

A bullet came singing up over the low brushwood and a distant tinkle of falling glass told that it had found its billet in a window. The bushes in the garden seemed

suddenly alive with rustling life and Sarrion dragged Juanita back from the balustrade.

"No—no!" she said angrily.

"Yes—I promised Marcos," answered Sarrion with his arm round her waist.

In a moment they were in the library where they found Cousin Peligros in an easy chair with folded hands and the face of a very early Christian martyr.

"I have never been treated like this before," she said severely.

Sarrion stood at the window, keeping Juanita in.

"It will be all over in a few minutes," he said. "Holy Virgin! What a lesson for them."

The din was terrible. The lady of delicate hearing placed her hands over her ears not forgetting to curl her little finger in the manner deemed irresistible by her generation. Quite suddenly the firing ceased as if by the turning of a tap.

"There," said Sarrion, "it is over. Marcos said they were to be taught a lesson. They have learnt it."

He quitted the room taking his hat which he had thrown aside.

Juanita went to the terrace. She could see nothing. The whole valley was hidden in smoke which rolled upward in yellow clouds. The air choked her. She came back to the library, coughing, and went towards the door.

"Juanita," said Cousin Peligros, "I forbid you to leave the room. I absolutely refuse to be left alone."

"Then call your maid," said Juanita, patiently.

"Where are you going?"

"I am going to follow Uncle Ramon down to the valley. There must be hundreds of wounded. I can do something——"

"Then I forbid you to go. It is permissible for Marcos to identify himself with such proceedings—in protection of those whom Providence has placed under his care. Indeed I should expect it of him. It is his duty to defend Torre Garda."

Juanita looked at the supine form in the easy chair.

"Yes," she answered. "And I am mistress of Torre Garda."

Which, perhaps, had a double meaning, for when she closed the door—not without emphasis—Cousin Peligros sat upright with a start.

Juanita hurried out of the house and ran down the road winding on the slope to the village. The smoke choked her; the air was impregnated with sulphur. It seemed impossible that anybody could have lived through these hellish minutes that were passed. In front of her she saw Sarrion hurrying in the same direction. A moment later she gave a little cry of joy. Marcos was riding up the slope at a gallop. He pulled up when he saw his father and by the time he had quitted the saddle, Juanita was with him.

Marcos' face was gray beneath the sunburn. His eyes were bloodshot and his lips were pressed upward in a line of deadly resolution. It was the face of a man who had seen something that he would never forget. He looked at his father.

"Evasio Mon," he said.

"Killed?"

Marcos nodded his head.

"You did not do it?" said Sarrion sharply.

"No. They found him among the Carlists. There were five or six priests. It was Zeneta—wounded himself—who recognised him and told me. He was not dead when Zeneta found him—and he spoke. 'Always the losing game,' he said. Then he smiled—and died."

Sarrion turned and led the way slowly back again towards the house. Juanita seemed to have forgotten her intention of going to the valley to offer help to the nursing-sisters who lived in the village.

Marcos' horse, the Moor, was shaking and dragged on the bridle which he had slipped over his arm. He jerked angrily at the reins, looking back with a little exclamation of impatience. Juanita took the bridle from his arm and led the horse which followed her quietly enough. She said nothing and asked no questions. But she was watching Marcos' face—wondering, perhaps, if it would ever soften again.

Sarrion was the first to speak.

"Poor Mon," he said, half addressing Juanita. "He was never a fortunate man. He took the wrong turning years ago. He abandoned the Church in order to ask a woman to marry him. But she had scruples. She thought, or she was made to think, that her duty lay in another direction. And Mon's life . . . well . . . !" He shrugged his shoulders.

"I know" said Juanita quietly . . . "all about it."

CHAPTER XXX

THE CASTING VOTE

THERE is in one corner of the little churchyard of Torre Garda a square mound which marks the burial-place, in one grave, of four hundred Carlists. The Wolf, it is said, carried as many more to the sea.

General Pacheco completed his teaching at the mouth of the valley where the Carlists had left in a position (impregnable from the front) a strong detachment to withstand the advance of any reinforcements that might be sent from Pampeluna to the relief of Captain Zeneta and his handful of men. These were taken in the rear by the force under General Pacheco himself and annihilated. This is, however, a matter of history as is also the reputation of Pacheco. "A great general—a brute," they say of him in Spain to this day.

By sunset all was quiet again at Torre Garda. The troops quitted the village as unobtrusively as they had come. They had lost but few men and half a dozen wounded were left behind in the village. The remainder were moved to Pampeluna. The Carlist list of wounded was astonishingly small. General Pacheco had the reputation of moving quickly. He was rarely hampered by his ambulance and never by the enemy's wounded. He was a great general.

Cousin Peligros did not appear at dinner. She had an attack of nerves instead.

"I understand nerves," said Juanita lightly when she announced that Cousin Peligros' chair would remain vacant. "Was I not educated in a convent? You need not be anxious. Yes—she will take a little soup—a little more than that. And all the other courses."

After dinner Cousin Peligros notified through her maid that she felt well enough to see Marcos. When he returned from this interview he joined Sarrion and Juanita in the drawing-room, and he looked grave.

"You have seen for yourself that there is not much the matter with her," said Juanita, watching his face.

"Yes," he answered rather absent-mindedly. "There is not much the matter with her."

He did not sit down but stood with a preoccupied air and looked at the wood-fire which was still grateful in the evening at such an altitude as that of Torre Garda.

"She will not stay," he said at last. "She says she is going to-morrow."

Sarrion gave a short laugh and turned over the newspaper that he was reading. Juanita was reading an English book, with a dictionary which she never consulted when Marcos was near. She looked over its pages into the fire.

"Then let her go," she said slowly and distinctly. And in a silence which followed, the colour slowly mounted to her face. Marcos glanced at her and spoke at once.

"There is no question of doing anything else," he said, with a laugh that sounded uneasy. "She will have nerves until she sees a lamp-post again. She is going to Madrid."

"Ah!"

"And she wants you to go with her and stay," said Marcos, bluntly.

"It is very kind of her," answered Juanita in a cool and even voice. "You know, I am afraid Cousin Peligros and I should not get on very well—not if we sat indoors for long together, and kept our hands white."

"Then you do not care to go to Madrid with her?" inquired Marcos.

Juanita seemed to weigh the pros and cons of the matter with her head at a measuring angle while she looked into the fire.

"No . . o," she answered. "I think not, thank you."

"You know," Marcos explained with an odd ring of excitement in his voice. "I am afraid we shall have a bad name all over Spain after this. They always did think that we were only brigands. It will be difficult to get anybody to come here."

Juanita made no answer to this. Sarrion was reading the paper very attentively. But it was he who spoke first.

"I must go to Saragossa," he said, without looking up from his paper. "Perhaps Juanita will take compassion on my solitude there."

"I always feel that it is a pity to go away from Torre

Garda just as the spring is coming," said she, conversationally. "Don't you think so?"

She glanced at Marcos as she spoke, but the remark must have been addressed to Sarrion, whose reply was inaudible. For some reason the two men seemed ill at ease and tongue-tied. There was a dull glow in Marcos' eyes. Juanita was quite cool and collected and mistress of the situation.

"You know," said Marcos at length in his direct way, "that it is only of your happiness that I am thinking—you must do what you like best."

"And you know that I subscribe to Marcos' polite desire," said Sarrion with a light laugh.

"I know you are an old dear," answered Juanita, jumping up and throwing aside her book. "And now I am going to bed."

She kissed Sarrion and smoothed back his gray hair with a quick and light touch.

"Good-night, Marcos," she said as she passed the door which he held open. She gave him the friendly little nod of a comrade—but she did not look at him.

The next morning Cousin Peligros took her departure from Torre Garda.

"I wash my hands," she said, with the usual gesture, "of the whole affair."

As her maid was seated in the carriage beside her she said no more. It remained uncertain whether she washed her hands of the Carlist war or of Juanita. She gave a sharp sigh and made no answer to Sarrion's hope that she would have a pleasant journey.

"I have arranged," said Marcos, "that two troopers

accompany you as far as Pampeluna, though the country will be quiet enough to-day. Pacheco has pacified it."

"I thank you," replied Cousin Peligros, who included domestic servants in her category of persons in whose presence it is unladylike to be natural.

She bowed to them and the carriage moved away. She was one of those fortunate persons who never see themselves as others see them, but move through existence surrounded by a halo, or a haze, of self-complacency, through which their perception cannot penetrate. The charitable were ready to testify that there was no harm in her. Hers was merely one of a million lives in which man can find no fault and God no fruit.

Soon after her departure Sarrion and Marcos set out on horseback towards the village. There was another traveler there awaiting their Godspeed on a longer journey, towards a peace which he had never known. It was in the house of the old cura of Torre Garda that Sarrion looked his last on the man with whom he had played in childhood's days—with whom he had never quarrelled, though he had tried to do so often enough. The memory he retained of Evasio Mon was not unpleasant; for he was smiling as he lay in the darkened room of the priest's humble house. He was bland even in death.

"I shall go and place some flowers on his grave," said Juanita, as they sat on the terrace after luncheon and Sarrion smoked his cigarettes. "Now that I have forgiven him."

Marcos was sitting sideways on the broad balustrade, swinging one foot in its dusty riding-boot. He could

see Juanita from where he sat. He usually could see her from where he elected to sit. But when she turned he was never looking at her. She had only found this out lately.

"Have you forgiven him already?" asked he, with his dark eyes fixed on her half averted face. "I knew that it was easy to forget the dead, but to forgive . . ."

"Oh—it was not when he was killed that I forgave him."

"Then when was it?"

Juanita laughed lightly and shook her head.

"I am not going to tell you that," she answered. "It is a secret between Evasio Mon and myself. He will understand when I place the flowers on his grave . . . as much as men ever do understand."

She vouchsafed no explanation of this ambiguous speech, but sat in silence looking with contemplative eyes across the valley. Sarrion was seated a few yards away. At times he glanced through the cigarette smoke at Juanita and Marcos. Suddenly he drew in his feet and sat upright.

"Dinner at seven to-night," he said, briskly. "If you have no objection."

"Why?" asked Juanita.

"I am going to Saragossa."

"To-night?" she asked hastily and stopped short. Marcos sat motionless. Sarrion lighted another cigarette and forgot to answer her question. Juanita flushed and held her lips between her teeth. Then she turned her head and looked at Sarrion from the corner of her eyes. She searched him from his keen, brown face—

said by some to be the handsomest face in Spain—to his neat and firmly planted feet. But there was nothing written for her to read. He had forced her hand and she did not know whether he had done it on purpose or not. She knew her own mind, however. She was called upon to decide her whole life then and there. And she knew her own mind.

"Seven o'clock," said the mistress of Torre Garda, rising and going towards the house. "I will go at once and see to it."

She, presumably, carried out her intention of visiting Evasio Mon's grave, and perhaps said a prayer in the little chapel near to it for the repose of the soul of the man whom she had forgiven so suddenly and completely. She did not return to the terrace at all events, and the Sarrions went about their own affairs during the afternoon without seeing her again.

At dinner Sarrion was unusually light-hearted and Juanita accommodated herself to his humour with that ease which men so rarely understand in women and seldom acquire for themselves. Sarrion spoke of Saragossa as if it were across the road and intimated that he would be coming and going between the two houses during the spring, and until the great heats made the plains of Aragon uninhabitable.

"But," he said, "you see how it is with Marcos. The Valley of the Wolf is his care and he dare not leave it for many days together."

When the parting came Juanita made light of it, herself turning Sarrion's fur collar up about his ears and buttoning his coat. For despite his sixty years he was a

hardy man, and never made use of a closed carriage. It was a dark night with no moon.

"It is all the better," said Marcos. "If the horses can see nothing, they cannot shy."

Marcos accompanied his father down the slope to the great gate where the drawbridge had once been, sitting on the front seat beside him in the four-wheeled dog-cart. They left Juanita standing in the open doorway, waving her hand gaily, her slim form outlined against the warm lamplight within the house.

At the drawbridge Marcos bade his father farewell. They had parted at the same spot a hundred times before. There was but the one train from Pampeluna to Saragossa and both had made the journey many times. There was no question of a long absence from each other; but this parting was not quite like the others. Neither said anything except those conventional words of farewell which from constant use have lost any meaning they ever had.

Sarrion gathered the reins in his gloved hands, glanced back over the collar which Juanita had vigorously pulled up about his ears, and with a nod, drove away into the night.

When Marcos, who walked slowly up the slope, returned to the house he found it in darkness. The servants had gone to bed. It was past ten o'clock. The window of his own study had been left open and the lamp burnt there. He went in, extinguished the lamp, and taking a candle went up-stairs to his own room. He did not stay in the room, however, but went out to the balcony which ran the whole length of the house.

In a few minutes his father's carriage must cross the bridge with that hollow sound of wheels which Evasio Mon had mistaken for guns.

A breeze was springing up and the candle which Marcos had set on a table near the open window guttered. He blew it out and went out in the darkness. He knew where to find the chair that stood on the balcony just outside his window and sat down to listen for the rumble of the carriage across the bridge.

He turned his head at the sound of a window being opened and Perro who lay at his feet lifted his nose and sniffed gently. A shaft of light lay across the balcony at the far end of the house. Juanita had opened her shutters. She knew that Sarrion must pass the bridge in a few minutes and was going to listen for him.

Marcos leant forward and touched Perro who understood and was still. For a moment Juanita appeared on the balcony, stepping to the railing and back again. The shaft of light then remained half obscured by her shadow as she stood in the window. She was not going to bed until she had heard Sarrion cross the bridge.

Thus they waited and in a few minutes the low growling voice of the river was dominated by the hollow echo of the bridge. Sarrion had gone.

Juanita went within her room and extinguished the lamp. It was a warm night and the pine trees gave out a strong and subtle scent such as they only emit in spring. The bracken added its discreet breath hardly amounting to a tangible odour. There were violets, also, not far away.

Perro at Marcos' feet, stirred uneasily and looked up

into his master's face. Instinctively Marcos turned to look over his shoulder. Juanita was standing close behind him.

"Marcos," she said, quietly, "you remember—long, long ago—in the cloisters at Pampeluna, when I was only a child—you made a promise. You promised that you would never interfere in my life."

"Yes."

"I have come . . ." she paused and passing in front of him, stood there with her back to the balustrade and her hands behind her in an attitude which was habitual to her. "I have come," she began again deliberately, "to let you off that promise —— Not that you have kept it very well, you know ——"

She broke off and gave a short laugh, such as a man may hear perhaps once in his whole life, and hearing it, must know that he has not lived in vain.

"But I don't mind," she said.

She moved uneasily. For her eyes, growing accustomed to the darkness, could discern his face. She returned to the spot where Marcos had first discovered her, behind his chair.

"And, Marcos—you made another promise. You said that we were only going to play at being married—a sort of game."

"Yes," he answered steadily. He did not turn. He never saw her hands stretched out towards him. Then suddenly he gave a start and sat still as stone. Her hands were on his hair, soft as the touch of a bird. Her fingers crept down his forehead and closed over his eyes firmly and tenderly—a precaution which was un-

necessary in the darkness—for she was leaning over his chair and her hair, dusky as the night itself, fell over his face like a curtain.

"Then I think it is a stupid game—and I do not want to play it any longer . . . Marcos."

THE END